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PLAYS OF THE GREEK DRAMATISTS



# PLAYS OF THE GREEK DRAMATISTS

Selections from Aeschylus, Sophocles,  
Euripides and Aristophanes



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## INTRODUCTION

IN ANCIENT ATTICA, as in Elizabethan England, a period of approximately one hundred years served for the full flowering of the drama. In each instance there was a long seed-time, and all glory was not gone when the ten decades had passed. But after Euripides in Greece, and Ben Jonson in England, further development ceased and decadence set in. However, the impress of the "Golden Grecian century" of drama is stamped on all our literature. Lyly, Jonson, Chapman; Dryden, Pope, Johnson; Keats, Shelley, Byron; Swinburne, Browning, Arnold; and in our own day, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Louis MacNeice have, each one, directly or obliquely, been influenced by the Tragic Three, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the Comic One, Aristophanes. What we propose to do is to supply the minimum background necessary for the thorough appreciation of the dramatic specimens we have selected.

It is worth while to remark, incidentally, that quite as much can be derived from the Greek drama in these translations as can be from the originals (unless one's own translations of the originals are fancied), because, though we have some idea of the quantities of Greek words, we have almost no conception of their sounds.

We should begin with a bit of history, since life and literature are, in our period perhaps more than in most others, inextricably entwined. Athens, "the Greece of Greece" as Thucydides called it, was the center of Greek drama, as indeed it was the center of Greek thought and expression and art, in the years between 500 B.C., when Æschylus was writing his first great tragedies, and 400 B.C., when Aristophanes was writing his last great comedies. Those years saw the magnificent exploits of Athens and her confederates in repulsing the first and second Persian invasions. They saw the recovery of Athens and her rise to commercial and military supremacy. Finally, they saw her embarkment on great imperialist ventures (the Peloponnesian War), her decline and fall. A roll-call of the statesmen, sculptors, prose writers, and philosophers of Athens contemporaneous during these hundred years sounds like a who's who of antiquity: Cimon, Pericles, and Alcibiades; Myron and Phidias; Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon; Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Plato. The enormous impulse to the Athenian spirit, and so to Athenian national art, of the political power and commercial ascendancy which resulted from her military victories is, again, remarkably akin to the impulse of energy and pride in the England of the late 16th and early 17th centuries after her defeat of the Spanish Armada.

Before correlating historical and dramatic development further, it is necessary to become briefly technical in describing the Greek Theatre of Dionysus

where all the dramatic performances of Athens were given. The Theatre stood within the sanctuary of Dionysus, the wine-god, at the south-east foot of the Acropolis. It was, of course, an open-air theatre, and the seats of the auditorium were hewn from the rock of the Acropolis. The front tier was reserved for the public magistrates, the middle seat for the priest of Dionysus. The centre of the theatre was the *orchestra* (or "dancing-place"), a circular space in which stood the altar of the god (the *thumelē*). Round more than half the orchestra—in horse-shoe fashion—were raised the tiers of seats which constituted the *theātron* (or "seeing-place") proper. Behind the orchestra, the audience saw the *skēnē*, a sizable structure having a façade with three doors through which the actors made their entrances. The stage was in front of the *skēnē* and somewhat above the level of the *orchestra*. A crane-like contrivance, the *mēchanē* (or, simply, "machine") served for the customary appearance of the gods high above the stage (hence, *deus ex machina*). Another device, the *ekkuklēma*, was a platform on wheels which could be rolled out through the central door of the *skēnē* for the purpose of revealing to the spectators what was happening behind scenes (as, for example, in Æschylus's *Agamemnon*, where Clytemnestra stands over the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra). These are obviously conventional mechanisms, as is our curtain. The Greeks, incidentally, had no curtain, and changes of locale were indicated by large prisms, turning on pivots, which had represented upon them something typical of the new scene. The chorus entered through passages between the *skēnē* and the *orchestra*, and stood on the *orchestra*. The flute player, who accompanied them, stood on the altar steps.

Tragedy arose, Aristotle maintained, out of dithyramb—a hymn in praise of Dionysus—which was, occasionally, dramatic in character. However, Aristotle's contention is open to serious objections: formal—for the choruses of tragedy differ in number and arrangement from the choruses of the dithyramb; etymological—for tragedy is literally translated as "goat song," and Aristotle does not supply the connection; and material—for tragedy is "tragic", that is, it results in disaster, or, at any rate, a narrow escape from disaster. Many hypotheses have been advanced to explain the derivation of tragedy; the one which appeals as most logical and most in harmony with our other data, is that of Dr. Farnell, as modified by Prof. Rose. The latter remarks: "We know very little of early Attic ritual; but if we suppose that there existed some kind of a rustic performance, connected with Dionysus himself, or possibly with some similar god of fertility whom on his coming to Attic he absorbed, we can easily imagine that it involved a contest in which the power of fertility was for some reason killed (as deities of that kind very often are, to rise again with new vegetation of the next year, or the next crop of corn), or at least endangered by a formidable adversary (Summer fighting for his life against Winter, possibly)." The chorus, quite possibly, wore goat skins as a disguise, chosen because of the mythical lustiness and fertility of the he-goat: hence "tragedy," or "goat song."

It is certain, whatever the accuracy of the foregoing, that tragedy was performed as an incident of public worship, in Winter and early Spring—"the

season when the world is budding and there is not enough to eat," as Alcman, the Greek lyric poet of the 7th century B.C., sang. It was, Sir Paul Harvey remarks, "a period of anxiety in a primitive community, of longing that the spirit of vegetation may duly be reborn, and of consequent intercession." At the festival of the Great Dionysia, the chief occasion for the performances, three poets competed for the crown bestowed by popular acclamation, each represented by three tragedies and one satyr play (a semi-religious, semi-mocking, and altogether grotesque presentation of a legendary theme, as a postlude to the trilogy). These four dramas constituted a tetralogy, and might, or as the case more frequently was, might not be connected by community of subject. The cost was borne by wealthy citizens (*choregi*), and the performances were organized by the magistrates.

Greek tragedy contained two elements, the choral and the dramatic. The choruses were in a variety of meters arranged in strophe (a stanza sung as the chorus proceeded in one direction), antistrophe (a stanza, arranged to correspond, that is, symmetrical, to the strophe, sung as the chorus turned), and epode (the concluding three stanzas, not symmetrical to the strophe or antistrophe). The drama proper was mainly in iambic trimeters (*u—u— u—u— u—u—*), which means that a long syllable followed a short one, regularly, for three bars per line.

The chorus was composed of twelve men, increased by Sophocles to fifteen, and was drawn up in a rectangular form. Its movements were based on this arrangement. Its principal dance (it must be remembered that music, songs, and dances were integral parts of the drama), the *emmeleia*, was slow, stately, and dignified.

Thespis (6th century B.C.) made drama, as we conceive of it, possible by introducing an "answerer" (actor) who replied to the leader of the chorus (the *coryphaeus*). Æschylus added a second actor, Sophocles a third. After Sophocles three parts were to be distinguished: the protagonist, who had the chief, but also the most difficult part; the deuteragonist, and the tritagonist. Each also took such other parts as could, in the nature of the plot, be combined with the main role. The actors were paid by the state, and distributed to the dramatists competing. They wore thick-soled buskins (in tragedy), appropriate masks (latterly revived by Eugene O'Neill), long robes, and head-dresses. Certain of the lyrical passages were sung, solo or chorus; and the iambic passages were musically declaimed. As tragedy progressed, the dramatic achieved preponderance over the lyric, and the role of the actor waxed as the role of the chorus waned.

Before commencing our remarks on the individual dramatists, it would be well to analyze tragic form. Greek tragedy follows a definite and conventional order, and it certainly aids in the reading to recognize the divisions. The prologue (*prologos*) precedes the entrance of the chorus, and sets forth the subject and situation of the drama. A song (*parodos*) accompanied the subsequent entrance of the chorus. Episodes (*epeisodia*), which might consist of lyrical passages or lamentations, songs or announcements by a messenger, are the base of the play. Songs of the chorus "in one place" (*stasima*) divided the

episodes, and were constituted of the thoughts or feelings evoked by them. The final scene (the *exodos*) came after the last of these choral songs.

There is little point in reciting the names of Phrynichos, Choirilos, Pratinas, and the rest of the pioneer Greek dramatists, for we know very little more about them than their names. For us, Greek drama begins with Æschylus (525-456 B.C.). Legend reports that Dionysus, in person, appeared to Æschylus while still a boy and commanded him to write tragedies. Apparently in devoted obedience to the god, he wrote seventy, fifteen of them taking first prize. Only seven, unfortunately, have come down to us; but, fortunately, three of them form our only extant example of a Greek trilogy: *The Agamemnon*, *The Choephoroi*, and *The Eumenides* (The "House of Atreus"). For some years after winning his initial prize in 484 B.C., he was the most popular poet in Athens. Sometime between 472-468 B.C. he accepted an invitation from Huron I, the tyrant of Syracuse, an inferior ruler, but a superior patron, to go to his court. He returned to Athens after a while, only to leave it again, and finally, in 458 B.C. Why he left is a matter of conjecture: his popularity was constant, and he had been granted a prize just before his departure. It has been supposed that his reasons were political, since Æschylus had no love for the new democracy and much for the old constitutional forms. Legend, which spares not even tragedians, is again vociferous, and attributes his death to a tortoise which an eagle let drop, mistaking Æschylus's bald spot for a rock.

Æschylus's religion is basic to the proper comprehension of his tragedies. It is a modified monotheism: Athena and Apollo are real, but Zeus is "the one God above all, who directs all, who is the cause of all." Zeus is not only above all other gods, but also beyond all human understanding. "How can I look into the mind of Zeus, that abyss where sight is lost?" Æschylus asks. His ultimate answer to the central problem of both drama and religion: how can an all wise, powerful, just, good and beneficent deity allow the existence of evil and the consequent punishment for it? seems to be: "Zeus, who made for man the road to thought, established 'Learn by Suffering' as an abiding law." Zeus is the source of human strength and purpose, Æschylus avows: "There is no power I can find, though I sink my plummet through all being, except only Zeus, if I would in very truth, cast off this aimless burden of my heart."

Æschylus's chief concern is, like Milton's, to justify the ways of God to man. He denies that the gods are jealous of man's prosperity; but prosperity leads men to "insolent forwardness"—and the wages of that are, of course, death. And death not only to the transgressor, but to all his descent, till the wrath of Zeus is appeased. The vengeance of Zeus, however, is not categoric; circumstances weigh in his balancing of evidence. If vengeance appears excessive, "jealous," it is because sin eternally begets sin, and Grace comes to man only "by force from the gods who sit on the thrones of majesty."

The profound piety of Æschylus, his high-minded and deeply moving faith in the "ultimate blessing of pain," together with his supreme creative ability, made Athenian drama the powerfully religious and superbly artistic force it is. Æschylus's is a grand rugged utterance, and on this count he has been, by



some commentators, compared to Marlowe of the "mighty line." However, in range and depth and tragic imaginativeness, the author of the book of Job is probably the nearer literary kinsman.

The exquisite diction of Sophocles, Prof. Murray remarks, "is a marked advance on the stiff magnificence of his predecessors." But, he adds, Sophocles "lacks the elemental fire of Æschylus, the speculative courage of Euripides." Æschylus "wrote in a state of intoxication"; Euripides "broke himself against the bars both of life and poverty." Sophocles had not the ecstasy of the one nor the turbulence of the other: what he had was "the beautiful *symmetria prisca*" which Matthew Arnold so much admired. Æschylus deprecated the questioning of the divine, yet sought to pierce its mysteries. Sophocles accepts, with no soul-searching, the workings of a divinely well-ordered world. Browning has remarked that business could never make Sophocles dull, nor passion wild, and this is perhaps the final word.

The life of Sophocles (495-406 B.C.) spans the period of Athenian ascendancy. "He was born," one biographer has put it, "when Athens was beginning to rise toward the zenith of glory and power, and he died at ninety before the setting of the sun." His family was probably of some social consequence; it was certainly not poor, for his father was a munitions maker, a profitable occupation always. Tradition maintains that Lampros taught him music and Æschylus tragedy. Better authenticated are the reports that he appeared in his own plays at least twice. His grace of movement and beauty of person are supposed to have been applauded, but his voice was insufficiently powerful for tragedy. Consequently he turned his energies to writing; that the energies were plentiful, his 125 plays attest. Twenty-four won first places at Dionysic competitions. His public career was similarly honored, and we are told that he was twice *strategus* (military commander).

Sophocles's construction is more skillful than either of the two other tragedians with whom his name is habitually linked. His use of "dramatic contrast" is particularly effective. His character analysis, if not as profound and revealing, is nevertheless surer and more consistent than that of Æschylus or Euripides. Jebb terms him "pre-eminently the dramatist of human character." Aristotle and the chief critics of antiquity agree in calling his *Œdipus the King* unsurpassed among Greek tragedies. Sophocles's language is, like his dramatic structure, "fit and due." It is never obscure or affected, always flexible and poetic.

Euripides (480-406 B.C.) was the last of the great Attic tragedians. The rationale of his dramas is to be found in his life and in his era. The year 431 B.C., as Prof. Norwood points out, is roughly the time of Euripides's earliest surviving work; it also marks the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, and the descent of Athens from the pinnacle of art and politics. "The Delian League (a confederacy of the Aegean cities under the leadership of Athens for the purpose of combatting the Dorian League of the Peloponneaus under the leadership of Sparta) had become an empire and then a tyranny; philosophy was for a while, to all appearances, undermined by the shallow accomplishments of the Sophists; democracy was becoming ochlocracy. The spectacle of

the rapid fading of so much glory had tainted men with that cynicism of which Euripides often speaks . . . he was compelled by the urgency of his environment, and by the law of his own nature to express the prevalent sense of moral and intellectual bankruptcy, but at the same moment to seek for, and to follow, the road towards a new, more humble, hope."

Euripides is said to have been a pupil of Anaxagoras, who taught that order in the universe was produced by a supreme overruling Intelligence—a belief contrary to the dominant mythology and the cause of Anaxagoras's banishment for "atheism"; and by Protagoras, who maintained that thought was sensation, and consequently all knowledge individual—a doctrine opposed to any religion which claims, as all religions must, a special validity for its precepts. If tradition here tells us true, much of the philosophy of Euripides is explicated. It is upon tradition and antique literary gossip that we must unfortunately depend for most of the details of his biography: that he was extremely unpopular among the Athenians, that he was a morese, cynical recluse; that his domestic viciousness was belied by an austere intellectual visage; and that his gloominess was intensified by two singularly unfortunate unions. We do know that of the more than ninety plays he wrote, only five won first prizes. In view of his intellectualization and his unorthodoxy, this is not amazing. However, he was easily the most popular poet of the younger generation of Athenians, and no antique dramatist has been more thoroughly studied since. Consequently, eighteen of his plays (including the *Cyclops*, our only extant satyr drama) have survived.

Euripides, it is clear, was antipathetic to the old gods and the old theology. Hecuba's prayer:

*Thou, earth's support, enthroned on the earth  
whoever thou mayst be, hard to discover,  
Zeus, be thou nature's law or the mind of man,  
I pray to thee: for by a noiseless course  
thou guidest human fate in righteousness.*

is the utmost concession Euripides made to theism: and this passage may be matched by innumerable others, of not lesser force, denying the existence and power of the gods. That Euripides was compelled to subdue his critical analysis seems indubitable. He was a tragedian, and consequently could only exhibit at the Theatre of Dionysus. If he had refused to curb his agnosticism, the ecclesiastical hierarchy would not have allowed his plays to be produced.

It is pertinent at this point to inquire why, considering his heterodoxy, was Euripides so devoted to the *deus ex machina* ending—the fortuitous intervention of the gods resolving plot complications? There are two possible answers. One is that the Athenians seem to have favored them; for Euripides sometimes goes out of his clear way to bring down the gods. A second, and more probable, explanation is that Euripides was interested primarily in the delineation of character and the presentation of a striking series of situations. The plot, as such, he considers to be of secondary importance, and a facile solution of its difficulties is eminently acceptable to him.

The plots of Euripides are not nearly so well articulated as those of Sophocles, or even those of Æschylus. The humanization of character is the essential contribution of Euripides to drama—and it is for this that he has been frequently termed “the father of the modern drama.” The heroes of Sophocles, unlike the heroes of Æschylus, show an occasional human quality; but in the main they are ideal. No place else in the Greek drama are the motives and emotions of the heroes so perspicaciously and penetratingly analyzed as they are in Euripides: that in the process of analysis, their heroism evaporates and the human being stands forth is all to the good.

Finally, there is the social-consciousness of Euripides. He was not a thoroughgoing radical, certainly. He believed that only a moderate democracy in which the middle class was strategically powerful could form an effective safeguard against the anarchic populace and the oligarchic rich. But he felt intensely the sufferings of humanity, and he was the effective champion of the poor and the slaves. Aristotle held that a slave was a living tool, the legal view and the universal opinion. “Euripides is apparently the only man of his day,” Prof. Norwood says, “who showed any sort of real sympathy for slaves; his nameless messengers, attendants, old men, and the like form a noble company of obscure and faithful ones.” Perhaps more important from the standpoint of emphasis are his warmly sympathetic studies of women. He was not, as Aristotle maintained, a misogynist, nor yet, as modern critics affirm, a feminist. “He was interested in women as an object for analysis and pity—not for admiration and idealization.” The view of one scholar who remarks that “of all ancient moralists, he is alone, or alone with Plato, in showing an adequate notion of that radical disease, an imperfect idea of woman, of which, more than of anything else, ancient civilization perished” is dubious as to the item of philosophical history, but sound as to the rest.

Technically, three elements of Euripidean art claim our attention. First, the choral odes, which, in contradistinction to the practice of the two older poets, are often not organic parts of the drama. Prof. Whibley comments that “Such continuity ceased to be possible when the myth was treated in a more realistic and modern spirit. Euripides could not get rid of the chorus; he was right, then, from his own standpoint in making it a free lyric adjunct, a source of variety.” Similarly, his long and undramatic prologues (ridiculed by Aristophanes) were the logical product of his limitations and his purposes: originally employed because of a conventional necessity, Euripides, to quote from Prof. Ketto’s recent *Greek Tragedy*, developed them into “a powerful means of controlling the story element of the play, either by removing our interest from the crude events, all or some of them, or by directing our attention to them more closely.” Lastly, the prevalence of rhetoric in the dramas of Euripides, must be noticed. His aptitude for rhetorical utterance is great, and he makes no attempt to curb it. Frequently, where we would expect to find the entire force and intensity of Euripides expended on the pointing up of a scene, we instead discover all his cleverness and forensic ability engaged in a spectacular display of rhetorical fireworks.

Concerning the style of Euripides, even Aristophanes confessed that, when

abhorring the philosophy of his tragic colleague, he was willing to copy the elegance of his style. Elegance the Euripidean style certainly has, but it has much more: lucidity, depth and tenderness, and when there is a dramatic necessity for it, concentrated passion. It is by turns sonorous and gnomic, "flowery" and unadorned, rhetorical and straightforward. From Aristotle, who acclaimed Euripides the most moving of the tragic dramatists, to Goethe who remarked that "all those who denied the sublime to Euripides were either poor wretches incapable of understanding such sublimity, or shameless charlatans who, by their presumption, wished to make more of themselves, and did make more of themselves, than they really were," Euripides has appealed the most strongly of the Tragic Three to the taste of those whom John Cowper Powys terms "the epicures of literature."

We have compared Æschylus to Marlowe and to the author of the book of Job; Sophocles suggests Goethe or Wordsworth; and Euripides is the ancestor of Ibsen and Tolstoi. But how find an analogue for Aristophanes? If we can conceive of a more indecent Rabelais and a less inhibited Mark Twain, plus a crueler Gilbert and a less restrained Shaw, plus a more violent Mencken and a no less radiant Shelley, then we have someone remotely approximating Aristophanes. Aristophanic comedy, remarks an authority, "was a peculiar mixture of broad political, social, and literary satire, polemical discussion of large ideas, with the burlesque extravagances that were deemed fitting to the festival of Dion." And Heine says, "A deep idea of world destruction lies at the root of Aristophanic comedy, and, like a fantastically ironical magic tree, springs upon it with blooming ornament of thoughts, with singing nightingales, and climbing, chattering apes." It is, once again, essential to review some social and theatrical history if we are to comprehend how and why flowers and nightingales and apes come to be on the same tree.

Aristotle begins his account of the origin of comedy with a false etymology. *Comedy*, he affirms, derives from *kōmē* (village), and he supplies the link by observing that the comedians, despised in the towns, found ready welcome in the villages. Actually *comedy* derives from *kōmōs* (revel)—and it must be kept in mind that revels were religious in essence, if not in superficial appearance. The performers, grotesquely attired and masked, and carrying large images of the phallus, were honoring the gods of fertility, particularly Dionysus. From these "traditional absurdities," which were alike good ritual and good fun, comedy developed. Susarion (about 582-560 B.C.), perhaps stimulated by the embryonic comic drama in Thebes and elsewhere, probably supplied the formal unity which alone was lacking, and so may be called "The father of Athenian comedy." The names of Chionides, Magnes, Kratinos, Eupolis, and some few other of the pre-Aristophanic writers of comedy we have, but little else that is definite. The work of Aristophanes (448-380 B.C.) is the Greek comic drama for our purposes.

Aristophanes belonged to the conservative party in Athens—the "anti-war party." The conservative party consisted of the land owning class who had little to gain from imperialist expansion, and much to lose from invasion. The adherents of the "war party" were, in the main, artisans and tradesmen, and



to them expansion meant profit. Aristophanes, of course, jibes at all the leaders of the democratic or "war party." But Aristophanic conservatism is thoroughgoing, and consequently he disliked and distrusted the new philosophy and the new drama as well as the new politics. He considered Plato a dangerous sophist and Euripides a degenerate artist. His eleven extant plays satirize politics and literature, educational theory and fiscal reform, free trade and feminism. Freedom to employ the wildest extravagance was apparently granted him, and he took full advantage of the grant. It is likely, however, that "the jokes and sarcasms he levels at individuals and institutions were not taken literally by his audience." Plato, who was venomously caricatured in the *Clouds*, seems to have taken Aristophanic ridicule in good spirit. At any rate, in his *Symposium* he represents Aristophanes as an agreeable and even charming companion.

Little is known of the life of Aristophanes. His father moved from Athens when Aristophanes was a boy, and the purity of his Athenian descent has been questioned. "For us," Prof. Jevon states, "his life is to be found in his plays." It will be noticed, by the way, that the structure of these plays is not so rigidly formal as that of tragedy. The chief technical difference is to be found in the *agôn* of comedy, which is a dispute between two adversaries, forming the main theme of the play. The themes vary, but are always treated amusingly and usually satirically. The chorus, whose function was excitatory rather than (as in tragedy) pacificatory, was composed of twenty-four men, ludicrously garbed and masked (*e.g.*, as birds, wasps, frogs, *etc.*). Their chief dance, which Aristophanes claims to have abjured, was the cordax; it consisted of a series of licentious gyrations.

However, the plays are the things, and it is difficult to believe that even a total ignorance of comic custom would seriously interfere with the reader's enjoyment of their riotous humor. The comedies show Aristophanes to be not only a great wit and a great poet, but also a great spirit. He wishes to satirize the bad (as he conceives it) in life, thought, and art out of existence. It is hard to be reconciled to his picture of Socrates as an arrogant and shallow sophist, but we may be assured that the driving force of Aristophanes in presenting the caricature was a moral social purpose, however mistaken. And frequently his courage is amazing. For example, the tyrant of Athens, Cleon, had prosecuted Aristophanes on a charge of high treason and alien birth for his *Babylonians* (a lost play). Aristophanes backed down no whit, and in the *Knights* he heaps upon Cleon a barrage of ridicule which might, were the antecedents unknown, be considered excessive.

The *Clouds*, which satirizes the new learning and gives us the acid etching of Socrates, the *Birds*, which takes up the cudgels for Æschylus and the old religion as against Euripides and the new; and *Lysistrata* (Madame Demobilizer) which ironically suggests a way to end the war; are, in our judgment, the best and most characteristic of his plays. That the tragic and the comic attained their peaks of development side by side is no anomaly. As Miss Hamilton says, "The step from the sublime to the ridiculous is easily taken." Indeed, the two are intertwined, and only the culture which produced Euripides

could produce Aristophanes. The skill of Aristophanes as a parodist, the surpassing beauty of his lyrics, and his amazing ability to limn a character or a concept tersely and unforgettably make him the peer of the Shakespeare who created Falstaff. Superiors he has none.

ARTHUR ZEIGER, M.A.

PLAYS OF THE GREEK DRAMATISTS



# AGAMEMNON.

## ARGUMENT.

FOR three generations the House of Atreus lay under a curse, the Curse of Kindred Blood. For when Atreus was king of Mycenæ, Thyestes, his brother, corrupted the king's wife, and with her plotted Atreus' ruin. So Atreus sought to slay him, and he fled from the land. But when after many days Thyestes returned, Atreus feigned to be reconciled to him, and bade him to a feast. But therein he had the flesh of Thyestes' own children set before their father, who unwittingly ate thereof. He, when he knew the truth, called down upon Atreus' house this curse, that kindred should still slay kindred to the third generation. And it came to pass that when Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, was made captain of the host of Greece which was to sail against Troy, he provoked the wrath of Artemis, and the goddess held the fleet wind-bound at Aulis, till he made atonement by sacrificing his own daughter, Iphigeneia. For this cause his wife Klytemnestra hated him, and conspired with Ægisthus, Thyestes' son, with whom she lived in adultery, to destroy him when he should come home from the war. So they prepared beacons upon the mountains between Troy and Greece, and set a watchman to watch for the first token that these should give of the fall of Troy.

And herein is told how Agamemnon came home from the war, and by what means his wife compassed his murder.

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

AGAMEMNON, *King of Mycenæ.*

KLYTEMNESTRA, *wife to Agamemnon.*

KASSANDRA, *a prophetess, daughter of Priam, King of Troy,  
and captive of Agamemnon.*

ÆGISTHUS, *son of Thyestes, co-plotter with Klytemnestra.*

WATCHMAN.

HERALD.

CHORUS, *consisting of Elders of Mycenæ.*

SCENE:—In front of the palace of Agamemnon.

(*A Watchman is couched on the palace-roof, gazing northward through the darkness before the dawn.*)

WATCHMAN. I pray the Gods for riddance from these toils,  
The long lapse of this watch of years, wherein  
Couched doglike, elbow-propped, on the Atreids' roof,  
I have learnt by heart the muster of night's stars,

Yea, those which bring men winter and summer-tide,  
 Bright potentates throned in the firmament  
 As stars—their settings and their risings know.  
 Now watch I for the token of the torch,  
 The splendour of fire that brings us word from Troy,  
 Brings tidings of her fall: for so constrains  
 Yon woman's heart man-mettled, aye expectant.  
 When on this couch night-wildered, dew-bedrenched,  
 I lie, a couch not visited of dreams,—  
 For Fear in Sleep's stead is my chamberlain,  
 That unafraid I cannot close mine eyes,—  
 Then, when I think to sing or hum a stave,  
 As who should shred him sleep-dispelling herbs,  
 Then weep I, and bemoan this house's plight,  
 Its foul misrule, far other than of old.  
 Now come with blessing, O release from toil,  
 Fire of glad tidings flashing through the gloom!  
*(A beacon-light gleams out on the northern sky-line.)*  
 Hail, torch of night, who tosset high a gleam  
 As dayspring fair, that meaneth many a dance  
 Arrayed in Argos, for this triumph's sake!  
 What ho! what ho!  
 Lo, I will certify Agamemnon's wife.  
 So from her couch leaping in haste shall she  
 Shrill forth a shout in welcome to yon torch—  
 If Ilium-town have fallen in very deed  
 As yonder herald-beacon manifests.  
 Myself will dance the prelude thereunto;  
 For I will count my lord's good-hap mine own—  
 The thrice-six cast me by the beacon-blaze.  
 Ah, be it mine to upbear with this my hand  
 My lord's dear hand when he returneth home!  
 No more—upon my tongue treads heavily  
*The ox.* The house's self, could it find voice  
 Would cry too plainly. I to such as know  
 Speak, nothing loth: for others—I forget. *[Exit.*

*Enter* CHORUS.

CHORUS. This is the tenth of the years since to plead at the War-god's bar  
 Rose in his might against Priam the king Menelaus: to war  
 Went Agamemnon beside him: of Zeus were their thrones, even twain;  
 Twain were their sceptres of royalty: like unto steeds that strain  
 Under one yoke were Atreides' sons: from our land led they  
 Galleys a thousand that wafted to aid them a warrior-array,  
 Shouting the fury of fight from their souls: it was fierce as the sound  
 Ringing through desolate places when vultures are wheeling round

High o'er their eyry in anguish for nestlings afar from it torn,  
 Heavily beating like oars the broad pinions whereon they are borne,  
 Hungry for tendance of nurslings whereof they are left forlorn—  
 Yet not alone; for Apollo or Zeus or the Wildwood-king,  
 Hearing the wail of the aliens that lodge in their city uprising,  
 Haply a lingering vengeance, yet sure, on the spoilers shall bring.  
 So hath a mightier Zeus, the Warder of Strangers, sped  
 Atreus' sons, for her sake whom full many a man would have wed,  
 Hard on the track of the prince Alexander, ordaining for these  
 Many a desperate grapple where fainted men's strength, and their knees  
 Bowed, and were dashed in the dust, and the shafts of the war-spears  
 crashed

Splintered in twain, where the battle-fronts Trojan and Danaan clashed.  
 Now is the end—as *it is*; and the doom foreordained is fulfilled.  
 Never by secret burnt-sacrifice, not by drink-offerings spilled,  
 Neither by tears, shall the Wrath for the rites desecrated be stilled.

We, whom the eld-withered frame made of little account, when went  
 Over the sea battle-helpers, abide; for our strength forspent,  
 Frail as the strength of a babe, o'er the staff bowed, wearily creeps;—  
 Yea, for the blood of the child, in the tender bosom that leaps,  
 Strengthless as eld is at first: the War-god therein hath no place:  
 So, when its leafage is sere, totters eld on its three-footed ways,  
 Nowise more strong than a child, as a dream—as a daydream, it strays.

But thou, O Klytemnestra, Argos' Queen,  
 Tyndareus' child, what is to do?  
 What hath befallen? What hast heard or seen?  
 What tidings have won through,

That thy commandment all the city round  
 Bids sacrifice? The Gods that sway  
 Yon burg—the Gods on high, beneath the ground—  
 Heaven-dwelling Ones, and they

That rule the mart—lo, all their altars blaze  
 With gifts thereon: to left, to right  
 The flaming offerings high as heaven upraise  
 Thanksgiving-hands of light,

Whereto the soft, the uncontaminate  
 Suasion of oil is ministering,  
 Of that pure chrism from the inviolate  
 Hid treasury of the King.

Tell us hereof whate'er thou canst declare,  
 Whose utterance crosses not Heaven's will;



So bring assuaging of this fever of care  
That darkly now bodes ill,

And now, at sight of yonder sacrifice,  
Hope's radiant smile thrusts back again  
Relentless fear, whose nightmare burden lies  
On hearts deep-gnawed by pain.

(Str. 1)

It is mine to chant the victory fated,  
And the omen that came in the wayfaring  
Of the mighty heroes; for unabated  
By years is the God's inspiration, and mated  
Therewith is the trust in whose strength I sing.  
I sing how the vehement eagle-omen  
Sped onward with spear and avenging hand  
Achaia's twin-throned lords on the foemen,  
Sped the one-souled chiefs of the stalwart yeomen  
Of Hellas against the Teukrian land;  
How the kings of the birds to the kings of the galleys—  
One erne black, one with the tail white-gleaming—  
Appeared on the spear-hand hard by the palace  
On a spot set clear for all men's discerning,  
Rending a hare with her brood yet teeming,  
Which was stopped in her last swift frenzied turning.  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net!*  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet!*

(Ant. 1)

Then looked on the warrior Atreids, heeding  
Their diverse natures with clear calm eye,  
The seer of the host, and the ravin-feeding  
Eagles he knew for the captains leading  
The host; and in vision thus did he cry:  
'By them that on this war-path have wended  
Shall the city of Priam be taken at last,  
And all the wealth that her towers defended  
For enriching of them that her cause befriended  
Shall Doom with ravaging hands lay waste.  
Yet the battle-curb of the guilty city—  
Be it not overclouded, untimely stricken  
By wrath divine; for with jealous pity  
For that wretched hare, looked Artemis lowering  
On her Sire's winged hounds, that, ere life might quicken  
To the birth, were mother and brood devouring—  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net!*  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet!*



'So gracious of heart is the Fair of Face  
 To the strengthless cubs—soft dewdrop-things—  
 Of ravening lions, and loveth well  
 The tender younglings that crave the udder  
 Of all the children of field and fell:  
 Therefore she saith, "Zeus, do me a grace:  
 Avenge me of these my fosterlings!"  
 Yon eagle-omen in part then brings  
 Good—yet hath it somewhat whereat I shudder.  
 To Apollo the Healer-god I cry;  
 I beseech him to plead with the Huntress, that she  
 Send no blasts breathing adversely  
 To cause the Danaan galleys to lie  
 Harbour-bound while the months go by,  
 To force them to offer a sacrifice dread,  
 Strange, lawless, whereof no feast is spread,  
 The seed of a feud that shall cleave to the house,  
 That begetteth rebellion against a spouse:  
 For therein doth a haunting curse remain,  
 The treacherous wrath that forgetteth never,  
 Though in seeming suppressed, re-arising ever,  
 Set on revenge for the child that was slain.'  
 Such doom, albeit with blessings blent,  
 Did Kalchas' voice shriek forth to the kings  
 From the omen seen in the way as they went,  
 And my voice with the boding in consonance rings—  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net!*  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet!*

((Str. 2)

Zeus—what'er 'Zeus' expresseth of His essence—  
 If the name please him on the lips of prayer,  
 With this name on my lips I seek his presence,  
 Knowing none else I may with him compare.

Yea, though I ponder, in the balance laying  
 All else, no help save Zeus alone I find,  
 If I would cast aside the burden weighing,  
 All to no profit, ever on my mind.

((Ant. 2)

He that erstwhile was lord of all created,  
 Set in resistless battle-might on high,  
 Now shall none name him, the oblivion-fated,  
 Seeing his day is utterly gone by.

Yea, his successor, from the empyrean  
 Hurl'd by a mightier wrestler, is no more:

But whoso chanteth Zeus's triumph-pæan  
Loyally, he shall gain all wisdom's store.

(*Str.* 3)

Zeus unto men the path of wisdom showeth:  
This as the law of life doth he ordain—  
'From suffering's root the flower instruction groweth.'  
Yet even in sleep the heart sees only pain

Dropping from memory's winepress: still is given  
Wisdom to scholars loth to understand:  
The Gods from thrones of majesty in heaven  
Must force their boon into the unwilling hand.

(*Ant.* 3)

So was it then: that elder squadron-leader  
Blamed not the prophet's counsel of despair,  
All helpless driven by Fate the tempest-speeder,  
What time in evil case the Achaians were,

Camped idly on the shore toward Chalkis facing,  
Whence none could sail, a-hungered, thirst-distressed,  
There where the tides this way and that way racing  
Past Aulis' mountain-haven, know no rest.

(*Str.* 4)

Blasts from the bitter north blew ever, bearing  
Deadly delay and famine in their train,  
Havenless wanderings to and fro; unsparing  
They battered hulls, and hawsers snapped in twain;

They made the long days longer: heavy-wearing  
Hours cankered Argos' flower with idleness:—  
When lo, a prophet-voice pealed out, declaring  
A curse worse than the bitter weather's stress:

Prophet to king spake, challenging defiance  
Of Artemis' decree: then horror-thrilled  
Dashed to the ground their sceptres Atreus' scions,  
And with indignant tears their eyes were filled.

(*Ant.* 4)

In dark despair the elder King spake, crying,  
'Woe to me if I do not her command!  
Yet oh, to see mine house's darling lying  
Upon the altar, and upon mine hand  
The life-streams of a slaughtered maiden dyeing  
A father's fingers!—wretched choice for me!

Yet—how forsake the ships, like recreant flying?  
How forfeit all this great confederacy?

None may blame these whose clamour fury-laden  
Demands a sacrifice to lull to rest  
The winds, though nought save slaughter of a maiden  
Avail—ah me! may all be for the best!

(*Str.* 5)

So he stooped 'neath the yoke of fate's compulsion;  
And the godless blast of a spirit's revulsion  
Swept through him, unclean, unhallowed, turning  
His soul to a purpose of reckless daring:—  
Oh hideous wellspring of woes, the uncaring  
Frenzy that trampleth on honour, the burning  
Passion that steels hearts! Thus the severance  
Of the fetter that trammelled the fleet, the deliverance  
Of a wanton was he by his child's blood earning!

(*Ant.* 5)

And the child-voice crying 'O father!' and pleading  
Those battle-fain deemsters heard unheeding;  
But her father, so soon as the prayer had been chanted,  
Bade the ministers raise her—yea, bade none falter—  
Like a kid, all drooping, above the altar  
Close swathed in her vesture; and, even as panted  
Her lovely lips with the words outrushing,  
Bade stay with the curb's might utterance-crushing  
The curse, lest his house thereby should be haunted.

(*Str.* 6)

And, with saffron-dyed robes to the earth down-streaming,  
Each death-priest she smote with the shaft pity-gleaming  
Of her glance—as a picture with eyes imploring  
That seemeth in act to speak—to soften  
Those hearts of stone! Ah, often and often  
Had her sire's halls thrilled to the glad outpouring  
Of her song by the tables banquet-laden,  
When the wine-drops were spilled, and the pure-voiced maiden  
Called down Heaven's blessing in chants adoring.

(*Ant.* 6)

And then—O, I saw not, I tell not! Fair issue  
Had Kalchas' devisings! The fateful tissue  
Of instruction from Justice's loom down-sweepeth  
On such as have suffered:—but what is her dooming  
Suffice it to know in the day of its coming.  
Who knoweth beforehand, beforehand weepeth.  
With the dawn's forthshining shall come revelation.  
That the end may be well is the supplication  
Of the near one, the dear one, who this land keepeth.

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

Queen, reverencing thy majesty I come;  
For meet it is to honour the King's wife,  
When of its lord the throne stands tenantless.

But whether for good tidings heard or no  
With hopes that herald joy thou sacrifice  
Fain would I hear, yet grudge not reticence.

KLYTEMNESTRA. 'With heralding of good,' as saith the saw,  
'Forth let the Dawn break from her mother Night.'

A joy beyond hope's vision shalt thou learn:

For Priam's city have the Argives ta'en.

CHORUS. What said'st thou?—through unfaith it 'scaped my ear.

KLYTEMNESTRA. The Achaians hold Troy: speak I clearly now?

CHORUS. Joy thrills me, crying challenge to my tears!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Thy loyalty in thy visage stands confest.

CHORUS. Now hast thou token sure thereof?—and what?

KLYTEMNESTRA. I have—how not?—except a god delude.

CHORUS. Dost thou lend easy credence to dream-shows?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Not for me fantasies of slumbering sense!

CHORUS. Hath then some wingless rumour gladdened thee?

KLYTEMNESTRA. As some young girl's hast thou misprized my wit!

CHORUS. How long time is it since the city fell?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Even in the night that gave this dayspring birth.

CHORUS. What messenger to such speed could attain?

KLYTEMNESTRA. The Fire-god:—he from Ida splendour hurled.

Beacon to beacon flung the courier-flame

Hitherward. Ida gleamed to Hermes' crag

In Lemnos. From the isle that giant torch

Did Athos third, the scour of Zeus, receive.

Soaring o'er flame-lit ridges of the sea

That torch triumphant journeying in his strength,

The pine's gold-gleaming splendour, like a sun,

Passed to Makistus' heights its message on:

Nor loitering he, nor heedless, as by sleep

O'ermastered, failed his part in heralding:

But o'er Euripus' flood the beacon-gleam

Far-flying brought Messapius' watchmen word.

They flashed back answer, sped the tidings on,

Touching with fire a heath-pile sapless-old.

The Titan torch in yet unminished might

High leaping o'er Asopus' plain—it seemed

A bright moon rising—to Kithairon's crag,

Uproused a new relay of courier-fire.

And there the watch disowned it not, the light

Far sent, but lit a huger bale than all.

And the glare darted o'er Gorgopis' mere,  
And, winning unto Aigi planktos' hill,  
Bade, 'Stint not ye the ordinance of fire!  
Uptossed they, kindled in unscanted might,  
A giant beard of flame that glaring soared  
Over the foreland that on Saron's firth  
Looks: down it lightened then, until it won  
Arachnê's watchtower-steeps hard by our town.  
Thence to the Atreids' palace down it flashed,  
This far-descended child of Ida's fire.  
Thus they which ran my torch-race by such rule,  
Hand passing it on to hand, fulfilled their course;  
Victor the first is, though he raceth last.  
Such sign, such token, tell I unto thee  
Of tidings sent me by my lord from Troy.  
CHORUS. Hereafter will I thank the Gods, O Queen:  
Now would I fain hear once again throughout,  
And marvel at the story thou dost tell.  
KLYTEMNESTRA. Masters of Troy this day the Achaïans are.  
Discordant cries, I ween, are loud therein.  
Pour into one bowl vinegar and oil—  
These shalt thou name antagonists, not friends;  
So from the vanquished and the victors now  
Are diverse cries heard, born of diverse plight.  
These, fallen on the bodies of their slain—  
On husband, brother, yea, on grey-haired sire  
The children—o'er the doom of dear, dear dead,  
With lips that now are slaves' lips wail aloud.  
Those—toil of vigil and fight constraineth them  
Famished to break their fast on what the town  
Hath ready, in no order billeted:  
But, even as each hath drawn the lot of chance,  
In Trojan mansions, now the spoil of spears,  
They lodge this day, escaped the frosts and dews  
Of naked skies, and careless as the Gods  
Shall sleep the livelong night unsentinelled.  
If these respect the Gods that in the land  
Made captive dwell, and temples of the Gods,  
The smiters shall not in their turn be smitten.  
But may no lust of greed upon the host  
Descend, for rapine of forefended things.  
For yet remains their half-race, even to run  
The backward course in scatheless home-return.  
Yea, though in heaven's sight guiltless fare the host  
Homeward, for slaughtered victims vengeance still  
Might wake—ay, though no sudden ills befall.

Lo, this thou hear'st from mine, a woman's mouth.

Now, in no doubtful balance, triumph the right!

This boon above all blessings do I choose.

CHORUS. Queen, like a wise man's, gracious is thy speech.

I, hearing the sure token named of thee,

Address me to thanksgiving to the Gods.

For priceless meed of labour hath been won.

[Exit KLYTEMNESTRA.]

Hail to thee, Zeus, O King! Hail, night of joy,

Winner for us of glory, who hast flung

A net close-trammelling o'er the towers of Troy!

Ha, none may overleap, nor old nor young,

Ruin's all-snaring coil that makes them thralldom's spoil,

Whose mighty meshes round their lives have clung!

Worship and thanks to Zeus who wards the right

Of host and guest! On Paris did he strain

Long since his bow, that his true shaft might light

Not ere the appointed hour, nor waste its flight

In voids beyond the stars, sped all in vain.

(Str. 1.)

They have for their transgression's meed

The stroke of Zeus: his hand herein

All men may trace: who wrought the sin

Have suffered as He hath decreed.

Who dares aver the Gods reck nought

Of human actions when man flings

The sanctity of holy things

Beneath his feet?—an impious thought!

Now stands revealed the vengeance reaped

When bold presumption, in despite

Of Justice, breathes the rage of fight

In pride of wealth by wrong upheaped.

But O, be mine a lot kept free

From suffering: mine be feet that pace

Paths that the steps of wisdom trace:

So shall content companion me.

For riches shall be no defence

Unto the man who from his sight

Spurns the great altar of the Right

In pride of full-fed insolence.



Yet is man haled as with a chain,  
 By scheming Ruin's resistless child,  
 Temptation, into sin beguiled.  
 What cure avails?—all, all are vain!

(*Ant. 1*),

Not hidden is the mischief: nay,  
 The gleam thereof glares lurid-dyed,  
 And, like bronze tempered ill, when tried  
 By touchstone-rasp and blows' assay,

So shows the sinner black in grain.  
 He chases, like some child, the wings  
 Elusive of a bird, and brings  
 Upon his country hopeless bane;

And no God heareth when he prays:  
 Nay, but the very God to whom  
 He kneeleth, spurns him to his doom  
 Who walketh in injustice' ways.

Even such was Paris: to the home  
 Of Atreus' royal sons he came,  
 And heaped on that guest-table shame,  
 In that he stole the wife therefrom.

(*Str. 2*)

And she left to her people the spear-clang ringing  
 On shields, and the arming of war-hosts sent  
 Overseas; and to Ilium for dowry bringing  
 Ruin, through those gates swiftly she went:—  
 Such a horror she dared! And, with groans proclaiming  
 Their grief, did the seers of her house lament:  
 'Woe for the home, for the rulers' shaming,  
 For Love's lost footprints, his bow unbent!'  
 But he—he is silent, is unreviling,  
 Though the world hath beheld him the scorned, the forsaken:  
 Overseas is his heart; and a phantom, beguiling  
 His spirit, her place in his palace hath taken:  
 And statues of loveliest mould may waken  
 Loathing alone; in his famishing eyes  
 Each spell of the Love-queen shattered lies.

(*Ant. 2*),

Vain joys in slumber a ravishing vision  
 Brings to the heart that doth wake and weep.  
 He seeth in fancy a rapture Elysian,  
 And his arms enclasp it, but may not keep.  
 Vanished the vision is, unreturning,

On wings that follow the paths of sleep.  
 In such anguished bereavement that house is yearning:  
 Yea, and bitterer harvest than this shall it reap.  
 And all through Hellas for heroes departed  
 Love widowed, love orphaned, in desolate places  
 Is waiting, unknowing and patient-hearted:  
 Yet shall anguish of mockery fill their embraces;  
 For, instead of the unforgotten faces  
 Of the heroes they dream of, to each man's home  
 Armour and ashes—nought else—shall come.

(Str. 3)

The War-god, who exchangeth  
 Men's lives for gold,  
 And, where the mad spear rangeth,  
 The scales doth hold,  
 Sends back to hearts that yearn  
 For a brave man's return,  
 Filling one small sad urn  
 Pyre-ashes cold.

With sighs love tells their story:—  
 In battle bold  
 Was one: one fell with glory  
 With garments rolled  
 In blood:—and each man died  
 All for another's bride!  
 In whispered pain and pride  
 Is the tale told.

While here grief's hushed defiance  
 Chides bitter-souled  
 Atreus' avenging scions,  
 There, lapped in mould,  
 They, round the embattled steep,  
 In death yet comely, sleep;  
 The land they won—and keep—  
 Doth these enfold.

(Ant. 3)

A people's execration  
 Speaks stern and low,  
 As when an outraged nation  
 Curses her foe.  
 Ah me! mine heart is fain  
 For what comes in night's train!  
 Slayers of many slain  
 Gods watch, I trow.



Unrighteous gain but tendeth  
To overthrow.  
The dark Erinnyes endeth  
All at one blow:  
Then is the proud down thrust  
To darkness and to dust,  
There where the strengthless must  
All hope forego.

Fame above measure given  
Brings man but woe:  
Full in his eyes Zeus' levin  
Flasheth its glow.  
Let mine unenvied weal  
Nor crush with armèd heel  
Cities, nor conquest feel,  
Nor thralldom know.

Tidings on flaming wings of triumph flew,  
And swift through Argos goes  
The rumour of it: yet if all be true,  
Or if 'tis some heaven-sent delusion—who,  
Ah me, who knows?  
Who is so babe-like, who in wit so maimed,  
That all his heart should glow  
At beacon-fires that forth their message flamed,  
Then, when the tale is changed, downcast and shamed,  
Should be brought low?  
How like the woman's spirit, to be crying  
'Hail!' to a boon, ere proof appear,  
With eager credence past all bounds swift-flying!  
Ah, but the rumour woman-vouched swift-dying  
Fails from the cheated ear.  
Soon shall we prove the faith of cresset-glare  
And beacon, and the swift relays of fire,  
If true they were, or whether, false as dreams,  
That welcome light came but to cheat our hearts.  
Lo, from the beach a herald comes, his brows  
Wreathed with the olive-sprays. Yon dust he bears,  
Twin-sister of the mire, my witness is  
That no dumb tongue—not like thy kindled flame  
Of mountain-logs, and smoke—shall now tell all:  
But, either words shall fuller joy proclaim,  
Or—out upon aught that contraveneth this!  
Come sequel glad to that glad vision seen!

Whoso for this land prayeth otherwise,  
His harvest be the sin of his own soul!

*Enter HERALD.*

HERALD. All hail, ancestral soil of Argive land!  
As dawns the tenth year unto thee I come.  
This one of many wrecked hopes wins to port.  
Never I trusted even here to die  
And share a dear grave in the Argive land.  
All hail, O land! light of the sun, all hail!  
Hail, Zeus high-throned o'er Argos! Pythian King,  
Thy bow upon us rain its shafts no more!  
Suffice that vengeance by Skamander-stream:  
Now turn thou, Saviour be, be Healer, King  
Apollo! To all Gods of Festival  
I cry, and to my champion Hermes cry,  
Dear Herald-god, of heralds aye adored.  
Heroes, who sped us forth, O welcome home  
Graciously us, the remnant 'scaped the spear!  
Hail, halls of kings, hail, roof-tree well-beloved,  
Hail, shrines revered, and Gods that take the morning!  
If ever of old, so now, with love-lit eyes  
With honour greet our King who comes so late.  
For bringing light in darkness is he come  
To you and all these—Agamemnon King!  
O greet him well—'tis seemly so to do—  
Who with the mattock of avenging Zeus  
Hath dug down Troy, hath ploughed up all her plain.  
Vanished her altars are, her fanes of Gods;  
All the land's seed hath perished utterly.  
Such yoke upon the neck of Troy was cast  
By Atreus' elder son, the King, who comes  
Heaven-blest, most worship-worthy of living men;  
Since Paris nor his crime-abettor, Troy,  
Can boast the penalty matched not the deed.  
He, of abduction and of theft convict,  
Forfeit hath paid, hath mown in ruin down  
His father's house, his fatherland withal.  
Twofold hath Priam's line for trespass paid.  
CHORUS. Glad greeting, herald from Achaia's host!  
HERALD. Glad?—though I died now, I would murmur not!  
CHORUS. Did love of home so wrestle with thine heart?  
HERALD. So much, mine eyes are dim with happy tears.  
CHORUS. Some sweetness was there in your heart-ache, then.  
HERALD. How?—teach me, so that I may grasp thy drift.  
CHORUS. Hearts yearned at home for you who yearned for *them*.

HERALD. Ha! the land sickened for her homesick host?  
CHORUS. Ay, from a darkened spirit oft I groaned.  
HERALD. Why brooded o'er your hearts this dire despair?  
CHORUS. Silence, long since I proved, is wrong's one salve.  
HERALD. Afraid wast thou—of whom, thy King afar?  
CHORUS. Ay,—as thou saidst, content I now would die.  
HERALD. Yea, all is well. Yet, in that weary time,  
Albeit I could tell of much fair speed,  
Some hardships vexed us:—who, except the Gods,  
Lives sorrowless in all things evermore?  
Of travail might I tell, bleak bivouac,  
Of iron-bound coasts, hard lying, groans on groans—  
Who knows how many?—through the straitened days.  
Then came new ills on land to vex us more:  
Hard by our foes' walls through the nights we lay;  
And dews from heaven, and reek of marshy mead  
Down drizzled, clammy-cleaving, rotting vest,  
And making man's hair like a wild beast's fell.  
But O to tell of winters that slew birds,  
By snows of Ida made intolerable,  
Of heats, when on his midnight couch the sea  
Unrippled sank and slept, and no breath stirred!  
What boots to grieve o'er these? Our toils are past—  
Ay, from our dead hath utterly past away  
All care, though it were but to rise again!  
Why of those wasted lives take nice account?  
Why need the living grieve for adverse fate?  
I to disaster bid a long farewell.  
For us, the remnant of the Argive host,  
The gain outweighs, the suffering strikes the beam;  
So that we well may boast to yonder sun,  
As over sea and over land we fleet—  
'The Argive army, conquerors of Troy,  
Hang up these spoils, a glory to their Gods,  
In ancient sanctuaries all Hellas through.'  
Now that ye hear this, Argos and her chiefs  
Ought ye to praise. The grace of Zeus, which wrought  
This, shall have honour. Thou hast all my tale.  
CHORUS. Thou hast routed my misgivings; this I own.  
'Tis ne'er too late for old men to learn good.  
Yet this, as meet is, toucheth most the Queen  
And the House Royal: I too am rich therein.

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. Erewhile I raised the jubilation-shout  
When came the first night-messenger of fire

Telling Troy's capture and her overthrow.  
 And one spake chiding, 'Unto beacon-tenders  
 Givest thou credence, to think Troy is sacked?  
 True woman thou, whose heart for such cause leaps!  
 So was I made to seem delusion's fool.  
 Yet sacrificed I: by thy queen's decree  
 One from another caught up jubilant cries  
 Through Argos, while in temples of the Gods  
 They lulled with wine the odorous incense-flame.  
 And now, what need that more thou tell to me?  
 Of my lord's self will I learn all the tale.  
 Haste will I now, with honour to receive  
 My lord revered at his home-coming. What  
 Can dawn with sweeter light to wife than this  
 The day she flings wide doors to her lord brought safe  
 By God from war? Thou tell mine husband this,  
 To come with all speed, come, the land's desire—  
 To come and find a leal wife in his halls,  
 Even as he left her, as a watch-dog staunch  
 To guard his home, a foe unto his foes,  
 And in all else the same, who of his seals  
 Have broken not one all this weary while.  
 Pleasure with man beside, or rumoured shame  
 No more I know than—how to dye a sword.

[Exit.

HERALD. Such protest proud, with truth fraught, misbeseems  
 No high-born lady's lips to utter forth.

CHORUS. So hath she spoken, so thou hear'st a tale  
 Fair-seeming—to clear-eyed interpreters.  
 Speak, herald—I of Menelaus ask:

Hath he, from perils safe brought back, returned,  
 And come with you, this land's beloved prince?

HERALD. I cannot tell things false and fair to hear,  
 So that my friends should long reap fruit of joy.

CHORUS. Would God thou couldst both tell good news and true!  
 'Tis all too plain that they be severed here.

HERALD. Lost is the hero from Achaia's host,  
 He and his galley: truth is this I tell.

CHORUS. Lost?—when in sight of friends he sailed from Troy?—  
 Or swept away by a storm that vexed ye all?

HERALD. Like perfect archer hast thou hit the mark,  
 And long calamity hast summed in brief.

CHORUS. Hath rumour come from any mariners  
 Beside, that speaks him living yet or dead?

HERALD. None knoweth, to give clear report thereof,  
 Except the sun, who fostereth all the earth.

CHORUS. How, say'st thou, came that tempest on the host,

By the Gods' anger, and how ended it?

HERALD. With an ill tale to mar thanksgiving's day  
Fits not. Heaven's praise should rest inviolate.

Now when with clouded brow a herald brings  
Hideous disaster from a field of rout,

And speaks a nation stricken with one wound,  
Speaks many a light of many a home doom-banned  
By Arês' twy-lashed scourge of fire and steel—

Twin slaughter-curse, blood-boultered chariot-pair,—  
Yea, when one cometh burdened with such woes,  
Well may he chant such pæan-hymn of fiends.

But when a herald of deliverance

Comes to a town exulting in her weal—

How shall I mingle good with evil, tell

Of storm that spake to Greeks the wrath of Gods?

For they which heretofore were utter foes,

Even Fire and Sea, conspired and plighted faith

For havoc of the Argives' hapless host.

One night a ruin of stormy billows surged:

Galley on galley by the norland blasts

Was hurled: adrift with helpless-plunging prows

Before the whirlwind storm, the rain of spray,

Vanished they, sheep by a demon shepherd chased.

And when uprose the sun's clear light, we saw

The Ægean Sea, a field of death, whose flowers

Were corpses of Achaians, wrecks of ships.

Ourselves and our good ship's unshattered hull

Some God, no man, whose hand was on our helm,

From doom snatched, or by intercession saved.

Fortune the Saviour sat and steered the bark,

That not at anchor riding was she swamped,

Nor crashed her keel upon the iron-bound shore.

Then, having 'scaped the Hades of the sea,

In clear day, doubtful of our own good hap,

Over this new disaster brooded we

Of the host stricken, beaten small as dust.

And now, if any of those be breathing yet,

Of us they speak as perished men—how not?—

As in like manner account we of their plight.

Yet may the best befall! For Menelaus,

With fullest hope look for him first to come.

Yea, if the sun's rays know him yet alive

And seeing light, by some device of Zeus,

Who wills not yet to annihilate his line,

Hope is there that he shall win home again.

All hast thou heard; and, know, thou hast heard truth.

[Exit.]

CHORUS. Now who was it named her so

(*Str. 1*)

With such a prophetic name?

Was it one whom we may not see?

Did the All-foreknowing her doom foreshow

Through the tongue that foreshadowed her evil fame,

And named her Helen, that she should be

Spear-wooded, and a kindler of enmity?

Helen?—nay, but a Hell—

Read we the riddle well—

To the ships, to the heroes, the town, that for her sake fell.

She fled from the delicate-costly hangings veiling

Her couch, on the breath of the Titan West-wind sailing:

But shielded hunters, a warrior host, were chasing

Her flight on the printless track of the oars swift-racing,

Till there, where the forest mantles Simois' strand,

For the blood-stained strife they drave their keels a-land.

(*Ant. 1*)

By relentless Wrath was she brought

Unto Ilium—*dear* indeed!—

By the Wrath that avenged the wrong

That her sin to the board of the guest had wrought,

And to Zeus, of the guest-bond who taketh heed.

Ay, the vengeance came, though it tarried long,

On the vaunting chant of the festal throng,

Even the bridal lay

Which the bridegroom's kin that day

Sang to the glory of him who had borne her away.

But the ancient city of Priam in dust repenting

Is learning the dirge of a multitude's lamenting:

Yea, and I ween in this hour with bitter sighing

'Out upon Paris, the bridegroom of Death!' is she crying

Mid the dirge for the blood of her sons that her multitude raise;

For the dregs hath she drained of a cup of ruinous days.

(*Str. 2*)

It was even as when one keepeth

A lion-whelp in his home

Yet craving the teat wherefrom

It was stolen; in young life's dawning

Tame, with the children it leapeth:

'Tis a joy in the elders' eyes,

And oft in their arms' warm nest

Like a nursling infant it lies,

Bright-eyed for caressing, and fawning

At hunger's imperious hest.



But, older grown, it displayeth  
 The inherited lion-strain;  
 For it rendeth the sheep it hath slain,  
 In requital for nurture: unbidden  
 That feaster his banquet arrayeth,  
 And blood-defiled is the house.  
 From its fury the scared slaves quail,  
 From the horror murderous  
 'Neath that roof for its ruin long hidden,  
 A god-sent priest of bale.

(Ant. 2)

(Str. 3)

Even so on Ilium-town  
 Floated a spirit down  
 Of peace, by seeming,  
 Of windless peace, a crown  
 Over her wealth-renown  
 Soft splendour beaming;  
 An arrow of desire  
 That archer-eyes were winging;  
 A flower soul-thrilling, springing  
 Out of love's bed of fire.  
 Yet from all this she turned: a bitter ending  
 For all that promised bridal bliss she wrought,  
 That fatal sojourner and guest descending  
 On Priam's line, a Fury ruin-fraught  
 From Guest-ward Zeus, tears to their house she brought.

(Ant. 3)

A saying of old—once known  
 Of all for wisdom's own—  
 Thus to men crieth:  
 'Great weal to fulness grown  
 Reaps even as it hath sown,  
 Nor childless dieth;  
 But fair prosperity  
 Aye bears for man one fated  
 Child of her womb, the unsated  
 Vampire Misery.'  
 But I alone stand, holding, as none other,  
 That Sin it is, the godless *act*, that bears  
 Spawn like itself, foul offspring of foul mother:  
 But they whose straight path righteousness prepares,  
 Fair is their lot, and goodly issue theirs.

(Str. 4)

But Arrogance, in sin grown grey  
 Mid vile men, bears a child at length

Like her in name, in lusty strength,  
Or soon or late, when dawns her day;

Yea, and a brother-fiend, whom none  
May cope with, impious Hardihood—  
Black curses twain o'er homes that brood,  
And like their dam each demon son.

(*Ant.* 4)

In smoke-fouled huts doth Justice shine;  
On virtuous lives she still hath smiled:  
From gold-tricked halls and hands defiled,  
She turns her with averted eyne.

A guest she is of each pure soul:  
She on the power of wealth looks down,  
With all its base coin of renown:  
She guideth all things to their goal.

*Enter AGAMEMNON in a chariot with KASSANDRA.*

Hail to the King who hath laid Troy low  
In the dust! Hail, Atreus' seed!  
How shall I greet thee? How shall I show  
Reverence due, that the meed  
Of thy welcome be not overshot by the bow,  
Be not under-run by the steed?  
For many of mortals honour, in sooth,  
Mere semblance, setting at nought heart's truth.  
Ay, ready be all to bear their part  
In bemoaning the stricken—but sorrow's dart  
Hath left them unscathed; it hath pierced not the heart.  
They rejoice in thy joy—but their gladness is feigned,  
For the smileless lips are to smiles constrained.  
But a shepherd of folk who is shrewd to discern  
Shall nowise be cheated by eyes that shine  
Soft as from hearts that in loyalty yearn,  
While their love is to true love as water to wine.

But thou, what time yon war-host was arrayed  
For Helen's sake—I will hide nought!—  
Wast with no flattering portraiture portrayed  
Of me: by thee the helm of thought  
Was, so deemed I, that day in folly swayed,  
When thou by sacrifice hadst brought  
Back courage unto men of death afraid.  
But now from mine heart's depth all lovingly  
The breeze of loyalty doth blow



To meet thy triumph: thou at last shalt see,  
By inquisition made shalt know,  
Who righteously, and who in perfidy  
Hath ruled thy folk for thee.

AGAMEMNON. First, Argos and the Gods of fatherland  
I greet, as right is—Gods who wrought with me  
Mine home-return and that great vengeance done  
On Priam's town. The cause no human tongue  
Pleaded, they heard; and into War's red urn  
Cast votes for Ilium's sack by warrior-toil  
With one accord. Unto acquittal's vase,  
Came hope of votes alone—unfilled it stood.  
To Ilium's fall yet witnesseth the smoke:  
Still Atê's flame-blasts live there. Dying down  
Her ashes spicy-odoured breathe of wealth.  
For this we owe the high Gods gratitude  
Unfading, seeing the toils of vengeance' net  
Round her were staked by us: for a woman's sake  
Stamped flat their town was by the monster Horse  
That Argos foaled, fraught with its shield-array,  
Which leapt their walls what time the Pleiads set,  
When that raw-ravening lion o'er their towers  
Bounding, of blood of princes lapped his fill.  
This, for unscanted prelude to the Gods:—  
The thought thou spakest heard I, nor forget.  
As thine my words are, and my heart as thine.  
Full few be they in whom there lives inborn  
Unenvious honour of a prosperous friend.  
Venom of malice deeply taints the heart,  
Doubling the burden of a soul diseased  
That bends 'neath its own trouble not alone,  
But sighs to see a neighbour's happiness.  
I speak that I do know; I have learnt to appraise  
The mockery-friendship—phantom of a shadow—  
Of men who feigned firm loyalty to me.  
Only Odysseus, loth albeit he sailed,  
Was my one never-failing yokefellow.  
Of him I say this, whether he be dead  
Or living. Touching Argos and the Gods,  
A general assembly will we call,  
And there take counsel. And we will devise  
How what is well shall long continue so,  
And, whatsoever needeth healing salves,  
By searing brand or knife, in cruelty kind  
Will we essay to medicine the disease.  
Now to the halls and hallowed hearths of home

I pass; there will I first salute the Gods  
Which sent me forth and have brought home again.  
Triumph attended me; may it abide.

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. Citizens, Argive ancients here in place,  
I will not shame before you to confess  
My wifely love. Time makes the fear of man  
To fade away. Not lessened by the lips  
Of others, will I tell my weary life  
Through long years while my lord beleaguered Troy.  
First, that the wife sit from her lord afar  
Lone in the house, is sore calamity;  
To hear heart-shaking rumours many an one—  
That this man come and that, with tales of woe  
Each worse than other, crying them to the house.  
Yea, if my lord had gotten as many wounds  
As many-channelled rills of rumour told,  
More than a net, as say they, were he pierced.  
Had he, as tale on tale affirmed, so died,  
He might, a second Geryon triple-framed,  
Boast he had gotten threefold vest of earth  
[Heaped o'er him—nought I say of all beneath,—]  
Who in each several form one death had died.  
By reason of these heart-shaking rumours, oft  
By force did others seize me, and unknit  
Rafter-hung nooses clinging round my neck.  
Yea, and our son for this cause stands not here,  
The warden of our troth-plight, mine and thine,  
Orestes, as was meet: yet marvel not.  
Fostered he is by Strophius, Phokis' king,  
Our leal war-helper, who of twofold scathe  
Forewarned me—peril unto thee by Troy,  
And peril of clamorous rabble-mutiny  
Hurling the council down. Inborn in men  
That proneness is, to trample on the fallen.  
Think not deceit is lurking 'neath my plea!  
Ay me! the gushing fountains of my tears  
Are dried up now; no drop upwells therefrom;  
And marred with nightlong vigils are mine eyes,  
While for thy sake I wept the beacon-piles  
Unkindled still. And ever midst my dreams  
The light wing of the slumbrous-humming gnat  
Brake off my sleep, while whelming thee I saw  
More woes than could be in that slumber's space.  
Now slips my load off; now with sorrowless soul

I hail my lord as dog that wards a fold—  
Sure mainstay of a ship—firm-stablished pillar  
Of some high roof—a father's only son—  
Land sighted past all hope by mariners—  
Light of a fair, fair dayspring after storm—  
Upwelling rill to thirsty wayfarer—  
Oh sweet to 'scape from fear's long tyrannous strain!

Lo, with such greetings dare I honour him.  
Gods, be not jealous!—sorrow's measure heaped  
We have borne already. Now, beloved lord,  
Step from this car, yet set not on the ground  
The foot that trampled Troy to ruin-heaps.  
Handmaids, why tarry ye, whose task it is  
To spread with woven splendour all his way?  
His path be straightway purple-paved, that Justice  
To a home may lead him he scarce looked to see.

As for the rest—care, never lulled to sleep,  
Justly shall order fate's work, Heaven to help.

AGAMEMNON. Daughter of Leda, warder of mine halls,

With my long absence well thy speech accords,  
So long drawn out! But fitting praise and just  
From other lips must come, and not from thine.

For this thing, pamper not in woman-wise  
Me, nor, like prostrate slave of Asian king,  
Mouth unto me a grovelling outcry,

Nor pave with robes my path, so to provoke  
Heaven's jealousy: ye thus must honour Gods.

For me to pace o'er purple braveries—  
A mortal, me!—I dare not do this thing.

As man, not God, do honour unto me.

Tush, without footcloths, without tapestries,  
My fame speaks loud. To keep a sober mind  
Is God's best gift. Him happy must we name  
Who wins life's end in sweet prosperity.

If thus we speed all through, I shall not fear.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Ah, say not so, to cross my purpose now!

AGAMEMNON. My purpose, know, I will not disannul.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Through *fear* hast thou so vowed unto the Gods?

AGAMEMNON. I know, none better, what I have said: 'tis fixed.

KLYTEMNESTRA. What think'st thou Priam, triumphing so, had done?

AGAMEMNON. Sooth, *he* had paced o'er broidered webs, I trow.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Then stand not thou in awe of blame of men.

AGAMEMNON. Yet mighty is a people's murmuring.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Tush! he that is unenvied is unblest.

AGAMEMNON. It misbeseems a woman so to strive.

KLYTEMNESTRA. It well beseems the fortunate to yield.

AGAMEMNON. How, car'st thou so for victory in this strife?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Yield!—nay, of free will grant me to prevail!

AGAMEMNON. Nay then, if this thou wilt, straight let one loose  
My shoes, the trampled servants of my feet.

May jealous glance of Gods not smite from far

Me on sea-purples trampling rich as these!

I shame to tread bright raiment in the dust,

Marring fair wealth and silver-purchased webs.

Thus much for this:—now graciously receive

This stranger-maid. God kindly looks from far

On such as mercifully use their power:

For none consenting bows to thralldom's yoke.

She, of war-guerdons many the choice flower,

The gift of Hellas' host, with me hath come.

Now, as constrained to hearken unto thee,

Treading on purples to mine halls I pass.

KLYTEMNESTRA. There is a sea—its well-springs who shall dry?—

That breeds the silver-costly purple's flow

Abundant, fadeless, wherein vests be plunged.

Thine halls have store of such, by Heaven's grace, King;

Thine house knows not what meaneth lack of aught.

Trampling of vests untold would *I* have vowed,

Had this in shrines prophetic been enjoined,

When I devised rich ransom for thy life.

For, while the root lives, foliage climbs the house

Uprearing shade against the dogstar's glare:

And thou, in coming to thy palace-hearth,

As sun-glow art that comes in winter-tide;

And when in bitter clusters Zeus matures

Wine, then is quickening coolness in the house,

If but the presence of its lord be there.

(AGAMEMNON enters palace.)

Zeus! Zeus Accomplisher! fulfil my prayers!

Take thought for that thou meanest to fulfil!

(Enters palace.)

(Str. 1)

CHORUS. Why and O why doth this terror insistently haunting me still

Like a bird of black doom hover nigh to the heart that is boding ill?

And a prophecy rings through the song that sings without bidding or guerdon

Evermore in mine ears, like a dream that no seers may interpret, whose burden

No cheering courage, enthroned in sway

Over my bosom, may spurn away.

Yet what is there now to be feared?—is the time not long gone by

Since the anchors cast from the sterns gripped fast the sands of Troy,

When thitherward hasted our sea-array?

(Ant. 1)

I have looked on the home-return of my King, with mine eyes have I seen:

Myself am my witness—yet oh, the Avenging Spirit's keen

Peals as from the choir of my thoughts: no lyre rings there to lighten  
The dirge of fear that no hope may cheer, no confidence brighten!

My soul's dark presage is not for nought,

Nor the rush of the flood of prophetic thought

That maddens my breast like a whirlpool that raves in its cavern-hall.

Yet not as this day I forebode, I pray, may the end befall,

Not thus to fulfilment the issue be brought!

(*Str.* 2)

His heart's desire of ease

And of health shall no man win;

For his neighbour still is disease,

And the party-wall is thin.

And what though the bark of his fate

With a straight course far and fast

Speed—hidden the dark reefs wait

Whereon it shall crash at the last.

O yea, in their fear men fling

The half of their wealth overboard—

As one whirleth a stone from a sling—

To save the rest of their hoard.

So the ship of a house, it may be,

Though a curse have freighted it full,

May not utterly founder, the sea

Not swallow the woe-fraught hull:

Yea, and not of such loss cometh dearth;

For by gifts of Zeus's hand,

And by boons of the furrows of earth

From their doors may famine be banned.

(*Ant.* 2)

But when once at thy feet on the ground

Is spilt the blood of the slain,

What spell-chant then shall be found

That shall gather it up again?

Else, wherefore did Zeus's stroke still

In stern foreknowledge the breath

Of the Master of Healing, whose skill

Could raise up mortals from death?

Yet—did not a Fate, from of old

Established supreme, restrain

Even Gods, that they cannot mould

Always the doom they ordain—

Mine heart would outstrip my tongue,

Would pour forth its hidden tale;

But darkness around it is hung

For a shroud: it must wait and wail;

And in anguish of soul, in despair



Of unknitting the links of the chain  
That is dragging my lords to the snare,  
Aflame is my spirit—in vain!

*Re-enter* KLYTEMNESTRA.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Pass in thou too—Kassandra, thee I name—  
Since Zeus unangerly hath made thee share  
Our house's laver-rites, midst many such  
Our thralls, by Zeus Wealth-warder's altar ranged.  
Step from the car; be not disdainful-souled.

What, even Alkmena's son, men say, of yore  
Was sold a slave, and brooked to bear the yoke.  
If then such doom of fortune fall to thee,  
Thank Heaven if thine be lords of ancient wealth.  
They which have reaped rich harvest past their hopes  
Are overmeasure always stern to thralls:

With us thou hast all rights of use and wont.

CHORUS. To thee she saith plain words, and so makes end.  
Since toils of destiny have tangled thee,  
Obey, if this thou wilt—ha! wouldst refuse!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Nay then, except, in swallow-wise, she own  
An uncouth speech of some outlandish folk,  
My words must reach her wit, and must prevail.

CHORUS. Pass in: what for thy state is best, she saith.  
Obey, and leave thy seat upon the car.

KLYTEMNESTRA. My leisure serves me not to tarry here  
Without. Beside the hearth, the home's mid-shrine,  
The victims stand, and wait the knife, the fire,  
For us who never hoped to win such grace.

If thou wilt do my bidding, tarry not:  
But if thou understand not these my words,  
In speech's stead sign with thine alien hand.

CHORUS. 'Tis an interpreter the stranger needs,  
Meseems. Her mien is wild as beast new-trapped.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Sure she is mad, hears but her maniac thoughts,  
Who hath left a city newly sacked, and come  
Hither, nor yet hath learned to brook the curb,  
Ere she in blood hath foamed away her rage.  
I waste no more words, to be flouted so!

[*Exit.*

CHORUS. I, for I pity her, will not be wroth.  
Come, hapless maiden thou, avoid yon car.  
Consent to feel fate's yoke, unfelt before.

KASSANDRA. Woe and alas!—alas, O Earth!

(*Str. 1*)

Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS. Wherefore for Loxias hast thou raised this cry?  
No God is he for mourners' company.

KASSANDRA. Woe and alas!—alas, O Earth!

(*Ant.* 1)

Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS. Lo, she blasphemes, invokes the God again!

It fits not he attend the wailers' strain.

KASSANDRA. Apollo! Apollo!

(*Str.* 2)

O Highway-god, destroyer of me!

For lightly hast thou this second time destroyed me!

CHORUS. Lo, words of prophecy of her own ills!

Even the thrall's soul inspiration thrills.

KASSANDRA. Apollo! Apollo!

(*Ant.* 2)

O Highway-god, destroyer of me!

Whither hast led me, to what roof convoyed me?

CHORUS. The Atreids' roof. If thou to this art blind,

I tell thee: falsehood here thou shalt not find.

KASSANDRA. Nay, but a haunt of the haters of God, which is privy withal

(*Str.* 3)

Unto manifold murders of kinsmen, to gins wherein doomed men fall:

Yea, 'tis a human shambles, the floor of a blood-reeking hall!

CHORUS. Keen-scented seems the stranger, like a hound

Questing the blood-slot till the prey is found.

KASSANDRA. Nay, I mistake not: the evidence yonder is plain to see.

(*Ant.* 3)

There, there be the children that weep for their own foul butchery,

Weep for their flesh that was roasted, a feast for their father to be!

CHORUS. Sooth, thy prophetic fame hath reached our ears;

But for that ancient tale we need no seers.

KASSANDRA. What plotteth the plotter?—woe and alas!

(*Str.* 4)

What strange dark deed in the house this day

Is devised, yea, now is coming to pass

Unendurable, cureless, while helpers stay

Ah, far away!

CHORUS. This thy last bodement's mark I cannot hit:

That know I; all the city rings with it.

KASSANDRA. Even now, O wretch, dost thou compass the deed!

(*Ant.* 4)

Thy lord in the bath thou refreshest—ah how,

How shall I utter the issue?—with speed

Shall it come!—thine hand to the blade stretchest thou

Even now, even now!

CHORUS. Not yet I understand: perplexed am I

Now, after riddles, by dark prophecy.

KASSANDRA. Ha, horror on horror! What yonder riseth?—

(*Str.* 5)

A net is this?—O meshes of hell!

And the net is his wife!—his death she deviseth.

Now let the unglutted Furies yell

O'er the sacrifice that she sacrificeth!—

Oh, a death of stoning should guerdon it well!



CHORUS. What, what Erinnyes summonest thou to wail  
This house's dirge?—thy words have made me quail.

Back to mine heart the ruddy life-drops run,  
Such drops as, in life's fated even falling,

Beat time unto the sinking of life's sun:—

I hear doom, swift doom, calling!

KASSANDRA. Ha see! ha see!—from his mate deliver

(*Ant.* 5)

The bull!—her treachery-robcs adorn

Him whom a victim trapped they give her;

And she hews down him of the sable horn.

In the brimming laver his limp limbs quiver!—

Of the bath of murder I warn thee—I warn!

CHORUS. In divination may I boast no skill:

Yet these words, as I deem, forebode but ill.

But—out of oracles what word of aid

Is framed for man? These bodings weirdly-ringing

Come mischief-fraught to hearts that hear dismayed

Their lessons terror-bringing.

KASSANDRA. Woe, woe is me for the ill doom wrought upon me the evil-  
starred!—

(*Str.* 6)

Ay, for I moan my doom—mine own with my lord's fate now do I blend.

Unto what end, O lost king, hast thou brought the hapless hitherward?

For nought but to be here slain with thee!—what other can be the end?

CHORUS. O frenzied heart, O demon-possessed, who touching thyself hast  
chanted

A tuneless strain, like the sad refrain of the nightingale tawny-golden

Who for Itys, Itys, with burdened breast, with spirit misery-haunted

Wails on and on, while the long days run of a life with woes enfolden.

KASSANDRA. Ah me, that the doom of the nightingale clear-voiced mine own  
might be!

(*Ant.* 6)

For in plume and wing soft-compassing the Gods her body arrayed;

And her life-days pass like a pleasant tale, and from tears of sorrow free.

But for me doth wait a merciless fate—the stroke of the two-edged blade!

CHORUS. Ah whence be the god-given visions that crowd on thee, horrors  
rashly boded?

This tale thou hast told hast thou shaped in the mould of song where is death's  
voice crying!

Thine ominous strains are shrilling loud with an utterance terror-loaded.

Where be they found, the limits that bound the paths of thy weird prophesy-  
ing?

KASSANDRA. Woe for the wedlock of Paris, for all whom he loved ruin-laden!

(*Str.* 7)

Woe for Skamander, the stream that our fathers knew!

Once, once on thy margent nurtured, a misery-fated maiden,

To womanhood I grew.

Now on the brink of the River of Wailing, the Stream of Despair,

'Neath the imminent darkness I shiver: my prophecy-chant ends there!

CHORUS. What thing hast thou uttered?—too plain for mistaking!

To a babe that had heard it its import were clear.

As a stab my heart felt it—mine heart is aching

For thy bitterest doom, for thine heart that is breaking

'Neath horrors I pale to hear.

KASSANDRA. Woe for the city through long-drawn agonies ruinward reeling!

(*Ant.* 7)

Woe for the altars whereon my sire offered up

Pastureland-nurslings by hecatombs, yet no salve of healing

Dropped thence in the deadly cup

Troy drank: there was no returning from death's door, none that would save!

And I—full soon shall my burning heart be stilled in the grave.

CHORUS. 'Tis the same song still from thy lips outrushing!

A malignant God is constraining thee,

Descending upon thee with might soul-crushing,

That the wine of death from thy spirit is gushing.

But the end—oh, what shall it be?

KASSANDRA. Nay then, no more the oracle through veils

Shall shyly peer, like some new-wedded bride;

But cloudless-clear to sunriseward, I wot,

Its wind shall blow, till, like a crashing surge,

Flash to the light a mightier woe than all.

No more by riddles will I lesson you:

Ye, coursing with me, witness how I scent

The slot of evil deeds wrought long ago.

List—never leaves yon roof that chorus-crow

Whose harmony is discord—a curse-chant.

They have lapped up human blood; so, bolder grown,

Aye haunt the house that hellish revel-rout

Whose presence none may ban, the Sister Fiends.

There brooding o'er the halls they chant their hymn,

The Primal Curse, anon spit loathing on

The Brother's Bed which ruined its defiler.

Ha, have I missed, or shot like archer true?

'Prophet of lies' am I, and 'street-door babbler'?

First take thou oath, then witness that I know,

Untaught, this house's sins of long ago.

CHORUS. Nay, how should oath-plight in all honour given

Bring healing here? Yet marvel I that thou,

Nursed oversea, should of an alien town

Speak, and speak sooth, as one that dwelt therein.

KASSANDRA. Prophet Apollo made this office mine.

CHORUS. A God—yet smitten with desire of thee!

KASSANDRA. I shamed to speak of this tale heretofore.

CHORUS. Ay, with prosperity goes ever pride.

KASSANDRA. A fervent suitor he, who breathed fierce love.

CHORUS. Came ye together by love's ordinance?

KASSANDRA. I promised Loxias—then I broke my troth.

CHORUS. His boon already given of prophecy?

KASSANDRA. To Troy already I foretold her woes.

CHORUS. How couldst thou pass unscathed of Loxias' ire?

KASSANDRA. No man believed me—my sin's wage was this.

CHORUS. Yet seem to us these thy soothsayings true.

KASSANDRA. Ah me! ah me! Woe for the curse, the curse!

Again they rack me, prophecy's dread throes

With terror-prelude agonizing me!

See ye yon shapes upon the roof that sit—

Babes, like unto the phantoms of a dream?

Children, slain as it were by their own kin,

With hands filled full of their own flesh for meat,

Grasping their hearts, their entrails, full in view,

Most piteous load, which their own father ate!

Vengeance for this, I tell thee, a craven lion,

Home-skulker from the wars, is plotting now

Against the hero on whose couch he lolls,

My lord—since needs must I bear thralldom's yoke.

Ah! the fleet's chieftain, who laid Troy in dust,

Knows not what treason yonder hell-hound's tongue

By fair speech long drawn out, an Atê lurking

Ambushed, shall bring to pass—a curse on her!

This deed she dares—a woman slays her lord!

What loathly monster shall I name her now,

And err not?—'Snake two-headed'?—or a Scylla

Haunter of rock-clefts, bane of mariners?

Or raging dam of Hades, breathing out

For her lord truceless war? She shouted o'er him,

All-reckless, as men shout for battle turned.

She feigns rejoicing for his safe return.

Heed me or not, 'tis all one: wherefore fret?

That which shall be will come. Right soon shalt thou

Pitying confess me all too true a seer.

CHORUS. Thyestes' banquet on his children's flesh

Shuddering I recognise, and awed am I

To hear this o'er-true tale in nothing feigned.

The rest—wide of thy boding's track I run.

KASSANDRA. Agamemnon's doom, I say, thou shalt behold.

CHORUS. Peace, wretched maid! Hush thine ill tongue asleep!

KASSANDRA. Ay, sooth, no Healer-god attends this word.

CHORUS. No! if it come to pass—which God forbid!

KASSANDRA. Thou dost but *pray*—at murder's work are these!

CHORUS. What man hath taken this foul deed in hand?

KASSANDRA. Utterly hast thou missed my boding's drift.

CHORUS. I grasp not its accomplisher's device.

KASSANDRA. Yet all too well I know your Hellene tongue.

CHORUS. So Pythian oracles do; yet dark are they.

KASSANDRA. O me! what fire is this climbs o'er mine head!

Woe's me, Light-king Apollo, woe is me!

Yon human lioness that with the wolf

Coucheth, while stays afar the nobler lion,

Shall slay me, wretched me! and with the cup

Of vengeance shall she blend my punishment:

And vaunts, while for her lord she whets the brand,

Of death-wage waiting him who brings me hither.

Why then wear I these mockeries of myself—

The staff, the wreaths prophetic on my neck?

These, ere mine own doom come, will I destroy.

Down to destruction ye!—I follow soon.

Make rich some other lost wretch in my stead!

Behold! Apollo's self is stripping me

Of prophet-vesture! Me he long hath watched

In these arrayed, a very laughing-stock

Of kin unkind—all wrong with one accord!

They called me vagrant, juggling mountebank,

A starveling beggar-wretch: and I bore all.

And now the Seer hath unmade me, his seer,

And haled me captive to this doom of death.

For my sire's altar, waits the heading-block

For me, to reek hot with the victim's blood.

Yet not by Gods all outlawed shall I die:

For mine avenger shall hereafter come,

The mother-slayer, his father's nemesis.

The wandering exile shall from banishment

Return, to set doom's topstone on his house.

For a great oath has by the Gods been sworn

That his dead father's corse shall draw him home.

What do I moaning pitifully here?

Since I beheld erewhile our Ilium-town

Faring as she hath fared, and in such plight

By the Gods' sentence those her captors are,

I too will go, will brace myself to die.

Lo, as the gates of Hades greet I these.

I pray to feel one mortal stroke—but one;

That without anguish-throe, while ebbs my blood

In pangless death, so I may close mine eyes.

CHORUS. O thou thrice-hapless woman and thrice-wise,

Long speech hath thine been! Yet, if this thy doom

Truly thou knowest, why unfaltering pace

To the altar, like some consecrated steer?

KASSANDRA. Escape is brought no nearer by delay.

CHORUS. At least time's vantage hath the last to die.

KASSANDRA. Mine hour is come—small gain were won by flight.

CHORUS. A resolute woman thou, a dauntless soul!

KASSANDRA. Nay but 'tis something like a queen to die.

CHORUS. Oh hapless who win such pathetic praise!

KASSANDRA. Woe for thee, father, and thy noble sons!

*(Goes to the palace-door, and recoils from it.)*

CHORUS. What meaneth this?—what horror turns thee back?

KASSANDRA. Pah!

CHORUS. What sickens thee?—is't aught thy soul abhors?

KASSANDRA. Murder: the house reeks all adrip with blood.

CHORUS. How?—this is scent of incense from the hearth.

KASSANDRA. It is a very charnel-house's breath!

CHORUS. Thou dost misname the balm of Araby.

KASSANDRA. I go—yea, therewithin to wail mine own

And Agamemnon's doom: enough of life.

Ah strangers!

Not at a bush, like bird once limed, I quake

For nought. Bear ye this witness to my death,

When, for the woman me, a woman dies,

And, for a man mismated, falls a man.

I, on death's threshold, do but beg this boon.

CHORUS. Brave heart, I pity thy foreboded fate.

KASSANDRA. Once more I fain would utter speech—no dirge

Over myself: I pray for this last time

The sun's light, that mine hateful murderers

May all at once to mine avengers pay

Quittance for this slain thrall, this helpless prey.

Ah, human life!—when most it prospereth,

'Tis but a pencil-outline. Let fate frown—

Dashed with a wet sponge all the picture fades. . .

Sadder than mine I count the common lot.

*(Enters the palace.)*

CHORUS. Who hath drunken his fill of the chalice

Of happiness? Who from the door

Ever thrust her of proudest palace,

Crying, 'Enter thou here never more!'

To our King have the Blessèd Ones given

To lay waste Priam's town,

And he comes, by the Lords of Heaven

Hither brought home with renown.

Yet now, if his blood must atone

For some that were long since slain,

If his death for a slaughtered one

Be a link in the vengeance-chain,



Who among mortals shall dare,  
 When he heareth his story, scorn  
 The lesson thereof, and declare  
 'Neath a happier star was I born'?

AGAMEMNON (*within*). *O me! I am stabbed deep with a mortal blow!*

CHORUS 1. Hist!—Who crieth '*I am stabbed*'? Who there is wounded mortally?

AGAMEMNON (*within*). *O me!—they stab me yet the second time!*

CHORUS 2. Done already is the deed, meseems, by Agamemnon's cry!

Nay, in common counsel join we: safety shall be found thereby.

CHORUS 3. For me, this is my counsel unto you:

Call the folk hither, raise the rescue-cry.

CHORUS 4. Into the palace break forthright, say I,

And by the dripping sword convict the deed.

CHORUS 5. Such is my counsel: thus I cast my vote—

Be something done. No time for dallying this!

CHORUS 6. Nay, that is clear: they are in act to raise

Their usurpation's ensign o'er the town.

CHORUS 7. We trifle time. They trample underfoot

All semblance of delay. Their hand sleeps not.

CHORUS 8. I cannot tell what counsel should be best.

'Tis his to counsel who is ready to act.

CHORUS 9. Yea, so think I; for I discern no art

Whereby with words to raise from death the dead.

CHORUS 10. How?—basely cling to life, and crouch and cringe

To these usurping lords who shame the house?

CHORUS 11. Nay, 'twere past bearing! Better far to die.

Death were a milder doom than tyranny.

CHORUS 12. Shall we, from tokens darkly vague as cries

Of pain, divine that dead a warrior lies?

CHORUS 13. We may not, ere we know, break into wrath.

Conjecture and clear knowledge are not one.

CHORUS 14. This rede, which all give, hath my full assent,

Clearly to learn how Agamemnon fares.

(*The back-scene opens, displaying corpses of AGAMEMNON and KASSANDRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA *steps forward.*)

KLYTEMNESTRA. Much in time past I spake to serve the time,

And blush not now to speak contrariwise.

Else, how should one who plots the doom of foes,

False friends, stake round them toils of mischief, raise

A net-wall higher than the prey may leap?

This struggle—I planned it long since, brooding aye

On that old wrong. O late my vengeance came!

Now all is done: firm stand I where I smote.

And so I wrought—O, I deny it not!—

That he could flee not nor avert his fate.  
 A gapless net in fisher-wise I drew  
 Round him, a web with ample verge of doom.  
 I smote him—twice: two wild shrieks, and his limbs  
 Sank nerveless down; and, even as he lay,  
 A third I dealt, in thanks for answered prayer  
 To Hades, Saviour of the earth-veiled dead.

So, as he fell, he gasped his life away;  
 And spiriting forth the sharp strong gush of gore  
 He dashed me with the dark spray, murder's dew,  
 Who joyed as joys sown land to feel the boon  
 Of God's rain in the travail of the ear.

Since thus it is, O Argive elders, now  
 Rejoice, if ye can joy: I—I exult!  
 If one might make libation o'er a corpse,  
 Well might I over this, ay, more than well.  
 The bowl of all the accursèd ills he brimmed  
 In his own house, himself came home to drain.

CHORUS. I marvel at thy tongue's bold hardihood,  
 Who moutheest out such vaunt above thy lord!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Ye look to cow me like some witless quean:

But I with heart unawed to you who know  
 Speak:—whether thou hast wit to praise or blame

Is all one:—this is Agamemnon, late  
 My lord, a corpse. This hand that did the deed  
 Wrought righteousness. The truth is as I say.

CHORUS. Woman, what poison hast eaten, what drug that hath cursed earth's  
 womb, (Str.)

Drunk of what potion envenomed upcast with the sea's bitter spume,

Thou o'er whose altar the sacrifice-smoke is the curse of a nation?

Traitress and murderess!—henceforth be thou cityless,

Monster, the whole land's execration!

KLYTEMNESTRA. On me thou passest sentence!—banishment

And hate of Argos, and a nation's curse—

Yet didst not move a finger against this man,  
 Who—heeding *her* fate no more than a beast's

Where sheep swarm countless in their fleecy herds,—

Slaughtered his child, of all my travail's fruit  
 Most dear, a charm to lull the Norland winds.

Him ought ye not have banished from the land

For his foul sin? But, hearing of my deeds,

A stern judge art thou! Now I say to thee,

E'en threaten on—prepared am I to meet

All force with force—to lord it over me;

*But vanquish first!* If God rule otherwise,

Thou shalt learn sanity—o'erlate for thee.



CHORUS. Haughty of spirit art thou, overweening the words of thy lips:  
(*Ant.*)

Raveth thy soul as one cursed by a fate wherein shed blood drips!

Plain to behold on thy brow is the stain of murder's pollution

Still unavenged! Thou shalt yet, of helpers forsaken, be met

By the sword that shall deal thee the sword's retribution.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Now must thou hear this ordinance of mine oath—

By the accomplished vengeance for my child,

By Atê, Erinnys, unto whom I slew him,

Mine expectation treads no Hall of Fear,

So long as burns one flame upon mine hearth,

Ægisthus, loyal to me as heretofore:

For my stout shield of confidence is he.

Low lies yon man, his wife's dishonourer,

That fondling of Chryseïds many at Troy:

Low lies his captive thrall, the portent-seer

Who shared one bed with him, the soothsayer

His couchmate leal, who on the ship-thwarts sat

Close-nestling to him. These have their deserts!

He, even as I have said: she, like a swan,

Hath chanted her last strain, a dirge of death,

And lies, his darling, there. She hath dressed for me

A dainty bridal-dish for my delight.

CHORUS. Not with agony-throe

On my frame may he leap,

Nor with long-delayed blow

Round my sick-bed creep—

Yet oh, might Death come to me straightway, and bring me the morningless  
sleep!

For my guardian, my lord

Low, low hath been brought:

For a woman he warred,

And great deeds hath he wrought—

And behold, by a woman his life and the glory thereof are made nought!

Oh madness of lust

Of Helen, through whom

Were multitudes thrust

Through the gates of the tomb!

One woman—and she before Troy unto lives without number was doom!

Unwashed, unforgot

Lay the old murder-stain:

Thou hast made the dark blot

Blush crimson again;

And the ancient feud of the house is become its master's bane.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Tush, pray not for death

As in grief for deeds past,

Neither Helen with breath

Of a curse do thou blast

As the murderess, bane of her people, the woe that for ever shall last.

CHORUS. Fiend, this work is thine

Who dost swoop with foul wings

On the twin-branchèd line

Of the Tantalid kings,

Thine this armèd rebellion of women, a horror my spirit that stings.

As a raven stands tearing

The corpse of one slain,

So stands she all-daring

O'er him, and the strain

Of her triumph she chanteth, her exultation's jarring refrain.

KLYTEMNESTRA. True word was that same

When the Fiend thrice-great

Of this house thou didst name:

For the blood-lust of hate

Evermore he rekindleth, and fresh wounds are dealt ere the old pang abate.

CHORUS. Of a fiend hast thou vaunted

Who is strong to prevail,

Whose fury hath haunted

This house for its bale—

Alas, the insatiate ruinous Fate of thine evil tale!

Ah, 'twas done as He willed

Who is First Cause of all!

When is purpose fulfilled

Of man, save as thrall

Of Zeus?—what thing of all these did not He foreordain to befall?

Oh my King! oh my chief!

For thee how shall I cry?

How shall love wail its grief,

While thou so nigh

Foully slain in this web of a spider outgassing thy life dost lie?

Woe for yon bed!

Tamely slain like a slave

There my King lieth dead,

Thrust down to the grave

By the steel in the fingers of treachery clutched, by the two-edgèd glaive!

KLYTEMNESTRA. And dar'st thou maintain

That of me it was done? . . . .

By no wife was he slain,

This Atreus' son;

But in shape of the wife of this corpse did the ancient terrible one,

The Avenging Sprite,

To exact the price

Of the foul feast dight

By Atreus, arise,

And for babes once slaughtered he claimed this man for the sacrifice.

CHORUS. Who shall witness for thee

That thine hands are clean—

Ah, how can it be?—

Of this murder, O Queen?

Yet—yet the ancestral Avenger may well thine accomplice have been;

For onward, unstayed

As a torrent in flood,

Dark Havoc doth wade

Through kindred blood

Till he come to the day of atonement for babes that were slaughtered for food.

Oh my King! oh my chief!

For thee how shall I cry?

How shall love wail its grief

While thou so nigh

Foully slain in this web of a spider outgassing thy life dost lie?

Woe for yon bed!

Tamely slain like a slave

There my king lieth dead,

Thrust down to the grave

By the steel in the fingers of treachery clutched, by the two-edged glaive!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Treachery!—*mine?*

*His* treachery first

Polluted his line

With child-murder accurst

Of Iphigeneia, for whom fell my tears in a torrent-outburst!

Is this child-slayer's doom not

The child-slayer's meed?

Ha, let him presume not

In Hades to plead

Against me!—for the steel hath avenged her whom he by the steel made bleed.

CHORUS. My mind is distraught:

Yea, hid from mine eyes

Be the pathways of thought;

And I cannot devise

Whither to turn in this hour when the house in ruin lies.

Lo, the blood-rain of doom!—

The first droppings are o'er—

It is sapping the home:

My heart quakes at its roar!

Hark! Fate on new whetstones is whetting the vengeance of one wrong more!

Oh Earth, that mine eyes

Had been dark 'neath thy veil

Ere I saw how he lies

On this bed of bale

'Twixt the silvern walls of the bath! Who shall bury him?—who shall bewail?

Wilt thou dare such a thing—

Even thou who didst slay!—

With thy death-dirge to wing

Thy lord's soul on its way?

For his mighty achievements such graceless grace wouldst unrightcously pay?

Ah, who shall upraise

O'er the godlike dead

The death-chant of praise?

What mourner shall shed

Tears, and with sorrow unfeignèd the path to his grave-mound tread?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Not unto thee

Doth this care appertain:

By me, even me,

Did he fall, was he slain:

I will bury him, I—but not with laments of his household-train;

But his daughter shall meet him,

As fitting it is,

With embraces shall greet him,

And welcoming kiss:

By the swift-flowing River of Anguish shall Iphigeneia do this!

CHORUS. The reproach that I said

Is hurled back in my face!

He were hardly bestead

Who would judge in such case.

Lo, how the spoiler is spoiled, how the slayer atonement pays!

Stands the ordinance sure  
 While the years of Zeus run,  
 That in suffering the doer  
 Pay for all he hath done.

From this house who shall banish the curse-brood?—with ruin 'tis knit into one.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Now dost thou attain  
 To true doctrine at last.  
 But for me, I were fain  
 To make oath-plight fast

With the fiend of the Pleisthenid house, to consent unto all that is past.

Be it never so grievous,  
 So he, through all days  
 Hereafter, would leave us,  
 To some strange race

Forth passing, with bloodshed of kin to afflict the same in our place.

Lo, for me it were well  
 To have scant wealth-store,  
 So I might but dispel  
 That cloud evermore

Which hath darkened with madness of murder-revenges these halls from of yore.

*Enter ÆGISTHUS.*

ÆGISTHUS. Hail, gracious light of retribution's day!  
 Now I confess that the avenging Gods  
 On earth's abominations look from heaven,  
 When I behold this man, glad sight for me,  
 Here lying in the net the Erinnyes wove  
 Punished for plots his father's hand contrived.  
 For Atreus, king of Argos, this man's sire,  
 Drove forth from home and city, a banished man,  
 My sire Thyestes—the plain truth is this—  
 His brother, rival with him for the throne.  
 Then suppliant to his hearth returning back,  
 Hapless Thyestes won reprieve from doom,  
 That his life-blood stained not his native soil:—  
 But Atreus, godless father of yon man,  
 Feigning, with hate that smiled all eagerness,  
 A banquet-day to welcome home my sire,  
 Set on the board for meat his children's flesh.  
 The feet, the comb-like fingers of the hands,  
 In secret from the limbs he snapped away  
 That none might mark. Unwittingly the sire

Ate food which was, thou seest, this house's doom.  
 Then, being made ware of that unholy deed,  
 Shrieked, reeled back from the butchery vomiting,  
 Cursed with an awful curse all Pelops' seed,  
 Spurning the board in symbol of malison—  
*'So perish all the line of Pleisthenes!'*

For this cause seest thou this man lying here;  
 And I am righteous plotter of his murder.  
 Me, yet a nursling, and my brethren twelve,  
 His father banished, with mine hapless sire:  
 Now, grown to man, hath Justice led me home,  
 And mine arm even from exile reached my foe;  
 For each device of this dark plot I framed.  
 Now would I hold it glorious to die,  
 Who have seen this man in toils of Justice trapped.

CHORUS. Ægisthus, insolence linked with guilt I scorn!  
 Thou say'st thou slewest this man wilfully,  
 The sole deviser of this piteous murder.

Thine head, be sure, in justice shall not 'scape  
 The curse of stoning at the people's hands.

ÆGISTHUS. And this to me, from thee, at the lowest oar  
 Sitting—to me, throned on the upper tier!

Thou shalt learn, dotard—learn a bitter lesson  
 For one so old—discretion's hest shalt learn!

Bondage and hunger-pangs physicians are  
 Right skilful, even to school the stubbornness  
 Of old age. Having eyes, canst see not this?  
 Spurn not the goad, lest thou in misery fall.

CHORUS. *Woman!*—didst thou, home-skulker, wait till men  
 Came home from war, shaming a hero's bed  
 The while, and plot a hero-chieftain's doom?

ÆGISTHUS. What, knave, these malapert words shall breed thee tears!

Far other tongue is thine than Orpheus had:  
 He drew all things by his song's witchery;  
 Thou, by thy witless yelpings angering us,  
 Shalt be thyself dragged, to be crushed and tamed.

CHORUS. And thou forsooth shalt be the Argives' king—  
 Who, when thou hadst contrived this hero's death,  
 Dar'dst not with thine own hand do murder's work!

ÆGISTHUS. By guile to take him was the wife's part, sure:  
 Me, as an ancient foe, suspicion watched.

But I by this man's treasure will essay  
 To rule this people. Whoso disobeys  
 Shall, yoked in heavy bands, strain in the shafts,  
 No full-fed trace-horse! Hunger, pitiless  
 Dweller with darkness, shall behold him tame.



CHORUS. Couldst thou not find it in thy dastard soul  
To kill this man thyself, but his own wife,  
Pollution of this land and of its Gods,  
Must slay him? Ha, Orestes lives, I wot,  
Lives to come hither home by fortune's grace,  
And conqueror be and slayer of these twain!

ÆGISTHUS. Since thou art determined so to do and speak, thou soon shalt know—

Up, my loyal comrades! 'Tis the hour for action! Guardsmen, ho!

*Guards of ÆGISTHUS pour on to the stage.*

CHORUS. On then ye!—Let every man grip ready drawn the naked brand!

ÆGISTHUS. Ay, and I shrink not from dying, so I perish sword in hand.

CHORUS. *Die*—thou say'st? We hail the omen! Victory for us, and life!

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. Nay, my best-beloved; to evils past add not new curse of strife:

Surely in the deeds achieved a woeful harvest have we reaped:

Sorrow have we now enough; let hands no more in blood be steeped.

Pass thou—ancients, pass to homes that fate beneath our sway hath brought,  
Ere ye do and suffer scathe. These things must needs have so been wrought.

If the troubles past suffice you, we consent the past be past,

Whom the Avenger's heavy wrath hath smitten with misfortune's blast.

Lo, a woman's rede is this, if any deign to learn thereby.

ÆGISTHUS. But that these at me should flicker tongues that blossom vanity!—

Yea, should hurl against me railings such as these, and tempt their fate,

Wander wide from paths of prudence, and insult my kingly state!

CHORUS. Ne'er shall this be Argives' wont, to cringe to villain reprobate!

ÆGISTHUS. Ha! but I will surely visit this on thee in days to come!

CHORUS. Nay, not thou!—if haply God shall guide Orestes hither home!

ÆGISTHUS. Tush! I know the food of exiles—hope, a never-fruited flower!

CHORUS. Work thy pleasure: batten, fouling justice, while it is thine hour!

ÆGISTHUS. Thou shalt yet, be sure, requite me for thy folly babbled now!

CHORUS. Vapour with a valorous mien, a cock beside his harem thou!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Reck not thou of these, to heed their empty yelpings: thou  
and I,

Rulers now of town and palace-halls, will rule them royally.

*[Exeunt Omnes.]*





# CHOEPHOROE,

or

THE MOURNERS.

## ARGUMENT.

WHEN the sin of *Ægisthus* and *Klytemnestra* began, they sent away *Agamemnon's* young son, *Orestes*, to the far land of *Phocis*, where King *Strophius* warded him safety, and *Pylades* the king's son loved him as a brother. So, when seven years, as *Homer* tells, had passed since the murder of *Agamemnon*, and *Orestes* was grown to man, he went to the oracle of *Delphi*, and inquired of *Apollo* what he should do to avenge his father, and to recover his inheritance; and the god bade him slay the murderers, straitly commanding him in no wise to spare his mother.

And herein is told how he returned secretly to *Mycenæ*, and found there his sister *Electra*, who dwelt in great affliction and abasement, by reason of her love for the dead, and how these twain devised and accomplished the bidding of the oracle.

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ORESTES, son of *Agamemnon*.

PYLADES, his friend, son of *Strophius* King of *Phocis*.

ELECTRA, daughter of *Agamemnon*.

KLYTEMNESTRA, wife and murderess of *Agamemnon*.

ÆGISTHUS, sharer in the guilt of *Klytemnestra*.

NURSE.

DOOR-KEEPER.

MESSANGER.

CHORUS, consisting of *Trojan* captives, handmaids of the palace.

SCENE:—In front of the Palace at *Mycenæ*.

*Enter* ORESTES and PYLADES.

ORESTES. Netherworld *Hermes*, steward of thy Sire's powers,  
My saviour be and ally; hear my prayer!  
For to this land from exile back I come,  
And on this grave-mound to my father cry  
To hear my voice, to hearken my appeal.  
This lock, my nurture's due to *Inachus*,  
This too, my mourning-offering, I shear;  
For not by thee I stood to wail thy fate,  
Father, nor waved thy grave-borne corpse farewell.

. . . . .

Ha! what is this I see?—what concourse draws  
 Hither of women in black vesture clad?  
 What stroke of fate shall I divine herefrom?  
 Hath some new trouble lighted on the house?  
 Or guess I aright, divining that these bear  
 Balm to the dead, drink-offerings to my sire?  
 Nought else may this be; for methinks I see  
 My sister Electra pacing there in grief  
 Pre-eminent. Grant me, Zeus, to avenge my sire!  
 Be of thy grace a champion unto me!  
 Pylades, stand we aside, that I may learn  
 Surely what means this suppliant maiden-train.

[*Exeunt.*]

*Enter ELECTRA, with CHORUS, bearing libations.*

CHORUS. Forth of the doors of the palace  
 In procession of woe have I sped,  
 With drink-offerings brimming the chalice,  
 With hands raining blows on mine head,  
 With cheeks scored with furrows red-staining  
 The fingers that do them despite,  
 With a heart that hath tears of complaining  
 For its meat day and night.

(Str. 1)

Lo, how for sorrows unending  
 My raiment is utterly marred;  
 Lo, how with comfortless rending  
 The fair-woven vesture is scarred,  
 The vesture whose fold on my bosom  
 Unseemly buffeted lies  
 Since calamity withered the blossom  
 Of smiles from mine eyes.

(Ant. 1)

For a horror prophetic, heart-thrilling,  
 Made the hair of our flesh uprise:  
 Out of slumber it shook us, filling  
 Our ears with wrathful cries.  
 Out of hollows of darkness calling  
 Came a voice at the midnight hour  
 Terror-winged, like a thunderbolt falling  
 On the women's bower.

Then they unto whom divination  
 Of vision and dream appertained  
 Spake by the Gods' inspiration

As men by the truth constrained,  
 Spake, saying, 'A slain man, lying  
 In the grave, for the vengeance due  
 In exceeding wrath is crying  
 Against them who slew.'

(*Str.* 2)

And the godless woman is sending  
 Me—O Earth Mother!—to pay  
 A graceless grace, that impending  
 Ills may be turned away.  
 Yet to pour on the grave the oblation,  
 And to utter the prayer, I dread:  
 O, how can there be expiation  
 For the life-blood shed?

Woe for the hearth polluted,  
 The hearth that is misery all,  
 For the ancient stock disrooted,  
 For the house that bows to its fall!  
 A sunless night hath enshrouded  
 In darkness of all men abhorred  
 The house that is curse-overclouded  
 Through the death of its lord.

(*Ant.* 2)

Invincible, quenchless, unfailing  
 Loyalty spake of yore  
 In men's ears, wrought all-prevailing  
 In their hearts—it is found no more:  
 Only the strong hand fear they;  
 Yea, power, that holdeth the rod  
 O'er their heads, as a god revere they,  
 Nay, more than a god.

Yet Justice is watching, to humble  
 The haughty: her swift dooms smite  
 Some at midnight; some stumble  
 On the marches of darkness and light  
 Ere the pangs long-evaded, that followed  
 Aye, turn their bliss unto gall.  
 Some—have they escaped? They are swallowed  
 In night that ends all!

(*Str.* 3)

When earth, man's nurse, hath once drunk in the life-blood's red pollution,  
 The stain that cries for vengeance lies, a never-cleansèd clot;  
 Even so the Curse that hoards for sin long pangs of retribution

May tarry while the all-cankering thing, his soul's disease, is ripening;  
But ne'er forgetteth, spareth not.

(*Ant. 3*)

As remedy is none, nor cure, when once the portals, keeping

Inviolatè the maiden state, by outrage opened stand,  
So all the multitudinous seas in one tide-race on-sweeping  
Will roll their waters all in vain for cleansing, when foul murder's stain  
Hath once incarnadined the hand.

(*Epode.*)

And I—the Gods have crushed me in the fall

Of my far-off war-leaguered home,  
Have haled me from my father's house, a thrall,  
Unto an evil doom.

And I must brook the brutal recklessness—

My life is not mine to control—  
Which calls injustice justice, must suppress  
The loathing of my soul.

And I, to hide my tears, must veil mine head,

Weeping the fate of my true chief,  
A glory ruined; and my heart seems dead,  
All frost-benumbed by grief.

ELECTRA. Ye handmaid-thralls, the palace-garnishers,

Since ye with me in this our suppliant-train

Are joined, be touching this my counsellors:—

When on his grave I shed these funeral bowls,

Offenceless how shall I invoke my sire?

Shall I say, 'This from loving wife I bear

To her loved lord'—*my mother being that wife?*

I dare not this: I know not what to say,

While on my father's grave this draught I pour.

Or shall I say this, after all men's wont—

'Oh grant thou fair return to those who send  
These wreaths—*ay, some gift worthy of their crimes?*'

Or in unhonoured silence, even as died

My father, shedding these for earth to drink,

Step back, as who casts out pollution, dash

The bowl to earth with unreverted eyes?

O friends, be ye my counsellors herein;

For in yon halls have we one common hate.

For dread of none hide aught your hearts within:

Fate's ordinance awaiteth both the free

And him that 'neath another's hand is thrall.

Speak, if thou hast aught better than my words.

CHORUS. Revering as an altar thy sire's tomb

I will speak, for thou biddest, all mine heart.

ELECTRA. Speak, as thou reverencest my father's grave.

CHORUS. Pouring, speak solemn words for loyal souls.

ELECTRA. And who be these whom of my friends I name?

CHORUS. Thyself first; whoso hates Ægisthus next.

ELECTRA. For me and thee, then, thus shall I invoke?

CHORUS. This with thyself rests to discern and judge.

ELECTRA. Whom then beside do I count for one with us?

CHORUS. Think on Orestes, though afar he be.

ELECTRA. Well said: most meet thine admonition is.

CHORUS. Then on that murder think; and for the guilty—

ELECTRA. What shall I pray? Instruct mine ignorance.

CHORUS. That one—God—mortal—may against them come—

ELECTRA. As judge or as avenger, wouldst thou say?

CHORUS. Say plainly, 'One to render death for death.'

ELECTRA. Nay, but were such prayer righteous in Heaven's sight?

CHORUS. *Not righteous!*—to requite foul wrongs on foes?

ELECTRA. Great Herald of the Lords of Heaven and Hell,

*(Going forward to the grave.)*

Help, Hermes of the Shades! O summon me,  
To hear my prayers, the Gods of Underworld,  
The awful Watchers o'er my father's house,  
And earth herself, which brings all things to birth,  
Which nurtures, and takes back their increase—thus!

*(She pours from the bowl.)*

I, pouring these drink-offerings to the dead,

I, calling on my sire, cry, 'Pity me

And dear Orestes! How shall we win home?

For outcasts are we now; we are chattels sold

By our own mother; her price, a paramour!—

Ægisthus, who conspired to spill thy life!

I am but as a slave, and from his rights

Exiled Orestes lives; they arrogantly

Are in the fruit of thy toils wantoning.

Oh, I implore thee, let Orestes come

Hither with fortune fair! Hear, father, hear!

And to me grant a heart more virtuous far

Than is my mother's, and a hand more pure.

These prayers for us: but for our foes I pray

That thine avenger, father, may appear,

And that thy murderers righteously may die.

Thus I confront the sinners' wicked prayer:

I imprecate this curse upon their heads.

For us, O send these boons to the upper world!

So help Gods, Earth, and Justice victory-armed!

Thus pray I, pouring these drink-offerings.

Now rain ye flowers of lamentation down

Upon the dirge ye chant for him, the dead.



CHORUS. Shed ye your tears! like the rain let them fall

Spilt for the life of our lord which is spilt,  
Shed on this grave-mound, the gateless wall  
That shuts earth's evil and good from our lord,

Shed to wash out the pollution of guilt  
That were brought with his slayer's libation outpoured.

Hear, O dread lord! From the darkness that lies—

Woe's me and alas!—on thy spirit's eyes

Hear! Let a strong spear-champion rise,  
Rise to deliver thine house, whose hand  
Shall strain the shaft on the Norland bow  
With the strength of the War-god, shall close with the foe,

And thrust to the hilt the brand!

ELECTRA. Now hath my sire the draught that earth hath drunk:—

*(Returning from the grave).*

But hear what strange tale from the grave I bring.

CHORUS. Say on—mine heart for terror fluttereth.

ELECTRA. This severed tress—I saw it on the grave!

CHORUS. Hair of what man or what deep-girded maid?

ELECTRA. A thing soon guessed: there's none but might divine.

CHORUS. Old am I, yet from youth I fain would learn.

ELECTRA. None living could have shorn such hair—save one.

CHORUS. Nay, foes are they who should with shorn hair mourn.

ELECTRA. This hair in gloss and hue is passing like—

CHORUS. Unto what tresses? This I fain would learn.

ELECTRA. To mine—to ours!—like sister-hair it shows.

CHORUS. Ha!—can this be Orestes' secret gift?

ELECTRA. Exceeding like his curls doth it appear.

CHORUS. Nay, hither how should he have dared to come?

ELECTRA. He shore, and sent, in homage to his sire.

CHORUS. None the less weeping-ripe thy words make me,

If never more his foot may touch this land!

ELECTRA. O'er me too sweeps heart-surge of bitterness:

I am stricken as by some deep-piercing shaft.

Burst from mine eyes, long drained of tears, the drops

Like thundercloud-outpourings after drought,

As I behold this tress! How can I dream

That any Argive owned this lock, save one?

'Twas never she, the murderess, shore it off,

My mother, she whose godless spirit of hate

To her own children, hath no touch of mother!

And I, oh could I but claim this outright,

This bright thing, for Orestes, best-beloved

Of men—ah, 'tis but hope that smiles on me!

Ah, that it had a messenger's glad voice!

Then, swayed no more 'twixt tide and tide of thought,  
 Then might I with sure knowledge spurn this tress,  
 As being severed from an enemy's head,  
 Or as my kindred might it mourn with me  
 Gracing this grave and honouring my sire.  
 Ah, but the Gods to whom I cry know all,  
 Know in what tempests, like men on the seas,  
 We toss. If fate ordain that we escape,  
 From this small seed a noble stock may spring.  
 But lo, here footmarks be, a second sign!—  
 Yea, human footprints—like unto mine own—  
 Yea, here be twain, the outlines as of feet,—  
 His own and of his fellow-wayfarer!  
 The heels, the tendons' impress measured—thus—  
 With mine own footprints tally, line for line.  
 O travail-throes, O wilderment of soul!

*Enter ORESTES.*

ORESTES. Pray thou—first thanking Heaven for one prayer  
 Fulfilled—that all the rest may be vouchsafed.  
 ELECTRA. Now what by Heaven's grace have I attained?  
 ORESTES. Thou see'st him whom but now thou prayedst to see.  
 ELECTRA. On whom call I, O thou who know'st mine heart?  
 ORESTES. I know Orestes is thine heart's adored.  
 ELECTRA. And what prayer answered, prithee, do I see?  
 ORESTES. Lo, I am he: seek none more dear than me.  
 ELECTRA. Stranger, wouldst weave a net of guile for me?  
 ORESTES. Then were my plot devised against myself.  
 ELECTRA. Nay, thou wouldst mock me in my misery!  
 ORESTES. In mine own misery, if in thine, 'twere done.  
 ELECTRA. Art thou Orestes? Must I name thee thus?  
 ORESTES. Thou seest my very self, yet doubttest me,  
 Thou sawest this lock, token of mourning love—  
 Thine heart's wings beat to think thou sawest me.  
 The print of mine own footsteps didst thou scan  
 Tokening thy brother's form matched with thine own.  
 Look on this lock, lay hair to severed hair:  
 And see this web, the work of thine own hand,  
 The shuttle-beats, the wild things there portrayed . . .  
 Nay, curb thyself, be not for joy distraught:  
 I know our near kin are our bitter foes.  
 CHORUS. O dearest treasure of thy father's house,  
 Hope of a saviour-seed watered with tears!  
 Thy might shall win thee back thy father's home!  
 ELECTRA. Dear presence, dear with dues of fourfold ties  
 To me! I may, I must, as father hail

Thee: and all love that round a mother clings  
 Is thine—most righteously is *she* abhorred—  
 And round that sister pitilessly slain!  
 My heart's one trust—O brother, glory mine,  
 Thou only! . . . Strength and Justice, with one more,  
 Zeus, of all mightiest, be on our side!

ORESTES. Zeus, Zeus, be thou beholder of our cause!  
 Look on that eagle-father's orphan brood—  
 Of him who died amidst the knots and coils  
 Of that fell viper. Fatherless be these  
 And famine-wasted, being all too weak  
 Home to the nest to bring the father's prey.  
 So mayest thou behold us, me and her,  
 Electra, children of a sire bereft,  
 Both suffering one banishment from home.  
 If thou leave these to perish, brood of him  
 Who with high honour did thee sacrifice,  
 Whose hand like his shall pay thee banquet-dues?  
 Lo, if thou leave thine eagle's brood to die,  
 Thou wilt have none to bear men tokens true,  
 Nor, if this royal stock should wither all,  
 Shall this thine altars serve on hecatomb-days.

Foster it, so to greatness shalt thou lift  
 From dust the house that now seems wholly fallen.  
 CHORUS. O children, saviours of your father's hearth,  
 Keep silence, younglings, lest one haply hear,  
 And for mere babbling's sake report all this  
 Unto our masters:—may I see them yet  
 Dead on the pyre mid spiriting flame of pitch!

ORESTES. Me verily Loxias' mighty oracle  
 Will fail not: through this peril he bade press,  
 Cheering me on, and through my fevered heart  
 Breathing deep mutterings of a storm of doom,  
 If I pursued not my sire's murderers,  
 Bidding me, fierce as wild bull, slay the slayers  
 With vengeance by no blood-gild to be stayed—  
 Yea, said, except I did it, mine own soul  
 Should in fierce agonies atone for all.

For He—who shows men salves from earth that spring  
 For ills malign—these plagues He promised me:  
 Tetters that with fierce pangs crawl o'er the flesh,  
 Eating away its life and sap of youth,  
 While white hairs sprout all o'er the blasted skin;  
 Yea, spake of onslaughts of the Avenging Fiends—  
 Ripe fruit whereof my father's blood was seed—  
 The shaft of darkness shot from the underworld

By suppliants murdered of their nearest kin;  
 Madness, and phantom terrors of the night,  
 Which I, through darkness staring, plain should see,  
 Would harass, would torment their victim, till,  
 Torn by their brazen scourge, he is driven from men:  
 And such lost wretches neither in men's feasts  
 Have part, nor in the Gods' drink-offerings,  
 From altars by a father's unseen wrath  
 Banned: such none dare receive, none dwell with them.  
 They die at last the outcast's friendless death  
 By wasting doom to ghastly skeletons worn.  
 Shall I put no faith in such oracles?  
 Yea, though faith fail, yet must the deed be done:  
 For many promptings to one end conspire—  
 The God's behest, my great grief for my sire,  
 Yea, and the grim constraint of penury—  
 That I let not this people world-renowned,  
 Who overthrew Troy by their heroism,  
 Be thus two women's serfs—for womanlike  
 His heart is: if not, let him bide the test!

*ORESTES and ELECTRA take their stand on either side of the tomb: the chorus group themselves round it.*

#### THE INCANTATION CHANT.

CHORUS. Destinies, Mighty Ones, grant that from Zeus may the issue betide  
 Even as Justice requireth, who now is arrayed on our side.  
 'Ever the tongue of hate shall the tongue of hate requite:  
 Aye for the stroke of murder the stroke of murder shall smite.'  
 Justice exacting her dues cries ringing-voiced this law.  
 'Doers must suffer'—so sayeth the immemorial saw.

(*Str. 1.*)

ORESTES. What can I say, what do, O hapless father,  
 So to waft down a light from 'neath our sky,  
 Down to the narrow bed where thou dost lie,  
 Piercing the folds of gloom that round thee gather?  
 Is it not so, that this our dirge, that singeth  
 Glories achieved, not all unwelcome ringeth  
 From these last Atreids, at thy doors who cry?

(*Str. 2.*)

CHORUS. My son, the spirit of the slain  
 No ravening jaws of death-bale fire  
 Destroy: he flasheth forth again,  
 Long after, lightnings of his ire.  
 Over the dead the keen are pealed;

And lo, his murderer stands revealed.  
 When fathers foully butchered die,  
 The wail for justice, shrilling high,  
 Follows the track of wrong to exact the penalty.

(*Ant.* 1.)

ELECTRA. Hearken, O father, then, as with strong crying  
 We yet again weep forth the orphans' pain.  
 Lo, on thy tomb we stand, thy children twain:  
 Heavenward ascends our lamentation's sighing.  
 Suppliants and exiles both thy grave hath found us!  
 Ah, is this well?—are evils not all round us?  
 Wrestle we not with ruin all in vain?

(*Str.* 3)

CHORUS. Yet out of all this God, so he be willing,  
 Shall waken shouts hereafter happy-thrilling;  
 And, for the dirge that o'er the grave-mound rings,  
 A triumph-chant shall hail in halls of kings  
 The dear one who to us deliverance brings.

(*Str.* 4)

ORESTES. But ah, that 'neath Ilium's walls,  
 My sire, by a Lycian foe  
 Spear-stabbed, thou hadst been laid low!  
 Then renown hadst thou left in thine halls,  
 And hadst made in the city's ways  
 The life of thy children a praise;  
 And a tomb in the land oversea  
 Had a great host toiled to raise  
 For their chieftain's memorial; and we  
 Had been comforted for thee.

(*Ant.* 2)

CHORUS. How had the love there welcomed him  
 Of old friends fallen gloriously!  
 Yea, in that nether kingdom dim  
 He had towered august in majesty,  
 Approved a minister to stand  
 Before the Lords of Shadowland,  
 Who, while he lived, was overlord  
 O'er kings who accomplish fate's award  
 By sceptered sway of hearts, by battle-breaking sword.

(*Ant.* 4)

ELECTRA. Yet I would not that thou, my sire,  
 With other thy folk, unto whom  
 The stroke of the spear dealt doom,  
 Before Ilium hadst lain on the pyre  
 Hard by Skamander's flow!



Nay, rather that even so  
 By their own kin slain amid peace  
 Were those who have laid thee low,  
 That far-away dwellers at ease  
 Might hear of the doom of these.

(*Mesode.*)

CHORUS. Ah child, above earth's best fortune were this  
 That thou namest: more precious were this than gold:  
 Not the dwellers in Fairyland know such bliss!  
 Well mayst thou—the heart's wish lightly is told.  
 Yet oh, I hear it—the heavy sound  
 Of the twin-lashed scourge of God draweth nigh!  
 Ay, the helpers of these lie 'neath the ground;  
 But the hateful usurpers' hands are polluted  
 With blood: ere long shall their power be disrooted;  
 For now with the children is victory!

(*Str. 5*)

ELECTRA. Thy boding triumphant is in mine hearing  
 Thrilling keen as the shaft that hath leapt from a bow!  
 Zeus, Zeus sends up from the realms below  
 Retribution that long hath delayed its appearing  
 To light on the felon hand all-daring—  
 Yea, on that mother to fall unsparing!

(*Str. 6*)

CHORUS. O might it be mine, o'er the murderer foeman  
 Murdered, to chant the triumph-song,  
 As he burns on the pine-logs, and over the woman,  
 The traitress, to hymn the avengèd wrong!  
 For why should I hide how the vengeance-vision  
 Aye hovers before me? Mine heart's prow forward  
 Driveth; and bitter as blasts from norward  
 Doth wrath's wind speed it on hate's stern mission.

(*Ant. 5*)

ORESTES. Ah, when shall Zeus, in omnipotence baring  
 His arm, reveal him the sinners' foe,  
 Cleaving their heads with avenging blow?  
 Then shall loyalty reign in a land well-faring.  
 I cry for the righting of wrong: O hear me,  
 Earth!—Underworld Powers, for mine help be near me!

(*Ant. 3*)

CHORUS. A Law saith, 'Murder-drops of blood-libation  
 On earth spilt, cry for blood in expiation.'  
 The Avenging Sprite shrieks, hastening Havoc on  
 Which brings from graves of men dead long ago  
 Ruin to crown the work of ruin done.



ELECTRA. How long, how long? Lords of the Shadow-regions, (Str. 7)  
 Look on us! Mighty Curses of the Dead,  
 Look on us, banned our home and hard-bestead,  
 Last of the line that owned this land's allegiance!  
 Whither may one turn, Zeus?—is all hope fled?

(Ant. 6)

CHORUS. Thrilling and throbbing mine heart hath hearkened  
 Unto thy wail: one while I despair,  
 And I feel my spirit within me darkened  
 As I list to thy passion of helpless prayer.  
 And anon cometh Hope, and she smileth in scorning  
 Mine anguish away, bringing strength and uplifting  
 Of soul, and the clouds from her face far-drifting  
 Reveal her, a glory, a splendour of morning.

(Ant. 7.)

ORESTES. What shall we say, and err not? Dare we smother  
 Flames of our anguished wrath for that blood-feast  
 Lapped by our dam?—O nay, 'twill ne'er be eased.  
 Ay, and our heritage from that fierce mother  
 Is the wolf-spirit whose hate is not appeased.

(Str. 8).

CHORUS. I have lifted my voice in the Aryan keen, as a Kissian wailing  
 I shrill my lament, and mine arms may ye mark tossed to and fro,  
 As my hard-clenched hands from above are in swift succession hailing  
 On mine all-wretched head, till it rings with their buffetings, blow upon blow.  
 (Str. 9.)

ELECTRA. Mother all-reckless in hate, thou didst cause like a foe to be borne  
 Unto burial a king unattended, a husband whom none would mourn,  
 Whom all unlamented thou daredst to thrust 'neath the earth as in scorn!  
 (Str. 10.)

ORESTES. Thou tellest our utterest shame, woe's me!—yet the shameful  
 despite,  
 If the Gods will but help, if mine hands may avail, will I surely requite!  
 Then I care not though I die, having thrust her from life and from light.  
 (Ant. 10.)

CHORUS. Hacked limb from limb was his corse, know thou!—as she dealt  
 with the slain,  
 So did she deal with his son, that thy life should be one long pain  
 Of exile. The pangs and the shame of thy sire—is their tale not plain?  
 (Ant. 8.)

ELECTRA. Thou tellest the fate of my sire:—me far from him then were they  
 keeping  
 Flouted and scorned: like some pestilent hound was I kennelled apart.  
 Think ye I laughed as I poured out the tear-drops, with floods of weeping  
 Wailing in secret?—O hear it and grave it upon thine heart!

CHORUS. Draw it in deep through thine ears with the silent footfall of thought.  
Such was the past: for the future let thy resolve burn hot: (Ant. 9.)  
Thou must enter the lists with a spirit to temper of steel fire-wrought.

(Str. 11.)

ORESTES. Father, I cry on thee; now be the ally of them that love thee!

ELECTRA. Yea, and I lift up my voice, while the flood of my weeping flows.

CHORUS. We shriek, as partakers with these, our invocation above thee.

Come to the light, and give ear: be our ally against our foes!

(Ant. 11.)

ORESTES. Let our might come to grips with their might, our right of their right make assaying!

ELECTRA. Accomplish, ye Gods, our desire, as Justice pronounceth her doom!

CHORUS. Trembling on me layeth hold, as I hearken the spell of your praying!

Long retribution hath tarried, but now at our prayers let it come!

O dread death-grapple wherein these kindred close!

O tuneless music of ruin's blood-stained blows!

O lamentable pangs past all enduring!

O anguish of the wound that baffles curing!

Yet of these shall the wound of the house find staunching now,

Yea, and from none of a stranger line, I trow:

These, these shall pace the grim feud's path blood-haunted.

Lo, to the Nether Gods this hymn is chanted.

Hear, Blessed Ones, deep under earth though ye be,

This our appeal, and your help send ye

Of your grace to the children, for victory!

ORESTES. Father, who diedst in unkingly wise,

Grant to my prayer the lordship of thine halls!

ELECTRA. Father, I too beseech thee—lo, I am sold

To Ægisthus: let me 'scape that deep reproach!

ORESTES. So shall for thee the feast of use and wont

Be stablished: else, where feast the dead Kings, thou

Wilt sit shamed, banned from earth's burnt-offerings' steam!

ELECTRA. From these old halls, of my rich heritage

Bridal libations will I bring to thee,

Yea, above all else honour this thy tomb.

ORESTES. Earth, send my sire to captain me in fight!

ELECTRA. Persephonê, crown him with fair victory!

ORESTES. Think, O my father, on the bath of death!

ELECTRA. Think on that strange net which they cast o'er thee!

ORESTES. In gyves not brazen, father, wast thou trapped,—

ELECTRA. But foully snared in palls of treachery.

ORESTES. Father, shall these reproaches rouse thee not?

ELECTRA. Wilt not upraise for love of us thine head?

ORESTES. Send Justice, in fair fight to champion us,

Or let us trap them, as they thee, by guile,

If thou, once vanquished, wouldst in turn o'ercome.

ELECTRA. And hear this, father, this our last appeal:

As on thy tomb thou seest thy nestlings crouched,

Compassionate thy daughter and thy son.

ORESTES. And blot not out in these all Pelops' seed;

For thus thou art not dead, though thou have died.

ELECTRA. For children keep alive a man's renown,

Though he be dead, as floats bear up the net,

Up-buoying from the abyss the flaxen line.

ORESTES. Hearken; for thy sake ring these wailings down:

Thyself art saved by granting this our prayer.

CHORUS. Full measure hath this prayer ye have lengthened out

To grace the tomb, the fate unwaived before.

The rest now, since thy soul is thus resolved,

Straight do, and put thy fortune to the proof.

ORESTES. That will I: yet 'tis pertinent to ask

Why sent she the libation, for what cause

Rues she too late a mischief nought may cure?

To an undiscerning dead man was it sent,

This sorry boon?—I cannot deem it so.

Yea, the gift falls so far short of the offence!

'Though one pour out his all for one man's blood

To atone, it is lost labour,' saith the saw.

Tell, if thou knowest, this: I fain would learn.

CHORUS. I know it, son, for I was there. By dreams

And haunting terrors of the night appalled

That goddess woman sent these offerings.

ORESTES. Heard ye her dream, to tell it certainly?

CHORUS. She dreamed she bare a serpent, herself saith.

ORESTES. And the tale's end and consummation—what?

CHORUS. In swaddling bands she lulled it, like a babe.

ORESTES. And what food did the new-born monster crave?

CHORUS. Herself gave to it in her dream the breast.

ORESTES. Did it not wound her dug, the loathly thing?

CHORUS. Yea, with the milk it sucked forth clots of blood.

ORESTES. Ha! not for nought!—a vision of a man!

CHORUS. Scared, from her sleep she sprang with one wild shriek:

Then for our mistress' help leapt into light

Lamps many through the halls, erst darkness-quenched.

So sends she these sepulchral offerings,

As who hoped these should charm away her doom.

ORESTES. I pray this earth, I pray my father's tomb,

That this her dream may be in me fulfilled.

Right well, I judge, doth it agree thereto:

For if the serpent from the self-same womb

Proceeding, in my swaddling bands was swathed,

And mouthed the self-same breast that nurtured me,

And mingled with a clot of blood the milk,  
 And she for dread thereof in anguish shrieked,  
 She surely must, who nursed that portent dread,  
 By violence die; and I, her serpent I,  
 Shall slay her, even as this dream foreshows.  
 CHORUS. Herein I choose thee for my soothsayer.  
 So be it! For what follows, tell thy friends  
 Both what to do and what to leave undone.  
 ORESTES. 'Tis soon said. Let my sister pass within;  
 And I beseech you that ye hide my plot,  
 That they who slew a prince by treachery  
 By treachery may in this our net be snared,  
 And so die even as Loxias foretold,  
 Phoebus the King, true prophet from of old.  
 In stranger's guise I, garbed at all points so,  
 Will to yon outer gate with this man come,  
 Pylades, guest and ally of our house.  
 And we will utter both Parnassian speech,  
 Feigning the accent of the Phocian tongue.  
 And if no porter with blithe welcoming  
 Receive us—since curse-haunted is the house—  
 There will we tarry till the folk, that pass  
 The halls, thereat shall marvel, and shall say:  
 Why thrusts he back the suppliant from his doors,  
 If in the land Ægisthus is, and knows?  
 And I, if once I pass the threshold-stone,  
 And find him throned upon my father's seat—  
 Or if he come and look me in the face,  
 Yea, cast his eyes upon me, be thou sure,  
 Ere he can say, 'Whence comes the stranger?' dead  
 I'll lay him, plunging through him the swift sword.  
 The Erinnys then, in slaughter stinted not,  
 Shall quaff her third draught—undiluted blood!  
 Now therefore, sister, watch well all within,  
 That this may fall with our aims consonant.  
 And you I bid to bear a silent tongue:  
 Keep peace where needeth, and in season speak.  
 In all else, Hermes, be thou nigh to aid,  
 Speeding aright each venture of my sword.

[*Exeunt ORESTES, PYLADES, and ELECTRA.*

(*Str. 1*)

CHORUS. Many a horror, fell and dread,  
 Great All-mother Earth hath bred;  
 'Twixt the deep sea's mighty arms  
 Man-destroying monster-swarms;

Sudden torches flashed on high,  
 Flowers amid dark fields of sky;  
 Fearsome winged and fourfoot things,  
 And the tempest's fury-wings.

(*Ant.* 1)

But the spirit fierce and fell  
 Maddening man, ah, who can tell?—  
 Maddening women reckless-souled—  
 Tell the passion uncontrolled  
 Aye with human ruin joined—  
 Loveless lust of female kind  
 That doth wedlock's tree disroot  
 In the man as in the brute?

(*Str.* 2)

Let him ponder, whose wit not aimless,  
 As a bird wide-wandering, flies,  
 What purpose did cruel-shameless  
 Thestius' daughter devise—  
 A purpose of fire, for the casting  
 Down on the red hearth-flame  
 Of the brand foredoomed twin-lasting  
 With her son's life, even as he came  
 Forth of the womb sudden-crying;  
 For, while yet it abode unconsumed,  
 He should see not the day of dying  
 Unto all men foredoomed.

(*Ant.* 2)

A hate shall she too be in story,  
 Even Scylla of blood-stained hand  
 Who destroyed the Cretans' glory  
 For love of the foe of her land.  
 For the necklace of gold she lusted,  
 The gift that Minos bore,  
 And the lock wherein Nisus trusted,  
 The tress immortal, she shore  
 From his head—O shameless-hearted!—  
 As he breathed mistrustless of doom  
 In sleep—his soul waked, and upstart,  
 For Hermes said, 'Come!'

(*Str.* 3)

Ah no, but these agonies olden  
 Of sin may in no wise compare  
 With the curse in yon halls enfolden,  
 With the union of horror there.  
 O adulterous, treacherous woman  
 Who plotted the death of her lord,



The champion dreaded of foemen  
 For the ruining wrath of his sword!  
 Ah, the hearth where runs not riot  
 The flame of passion, the grace  
 Of a spirit meek and quiet  
 In woman, I praise.

(Ant. 3)

Nay, of crimes 'tis the Lesbian beareth  
 The palm; ever loathèd it is  
 And bewailed: still one compareth  
 Each ghastliest horror with this.  
 That race that with sin's defiling  
 Was tainted, hated and banned  
 Of the Gods, a scorn and reviling  
 Long since perished out of the land.  
 None honoureth, none relenteth  
 Unto that which the high Gods curse.  
 I compare them—yea, Justice consenteth—  
 Their sin and hers.

(Str. 4)

But the keen-whetted sword maketh severance  
 Of the breath-ways of life, deep thrust  
 By Justice's hand; for the Right  
 Transgressed is not spurned out of sight  
 By them that would do despite  
 Unto Zeus, to deny him reverence  
 Overstepping the path of the just.

(Ant. 4)

Lo, the anvil of Justice is planted  
 Firm, and the swordsmith Fate  
 Is forging the Sword of Doom:  
 The deep-brooding Erinnys brings home  
 The child Retribution, of whom  
 Shall the blood-pollution, that haunted  
 The house, be avenged thus late.

*The scene changes to the front of the palace.*

ORESTES. Ho! gate-ward, list my knocking at the door!  
 Who is within?—ho, gate-ward, once again!  
 Lo, the third time I cry, 'Come forth the house!'—  
 If great Ægisthus is the stranger's friend.

DOOR-KEEPER. Ho there! I hear! Of what land art thou?—whence?

ORESTES. Bear word unto the masters of the house;  
 For 'tis to these I come, and tidings bring—  
 Nay, haste thee, for the dusky car of night  
 Speeds on, and time it is that wayfarers



Drop anchor in hospitable hostelry.  
 Let one who hath authority come forth—  
 The mistress—nay, her lord were seemlier;  
 For then for shamefastness words falter not  
 In mid-speech: man with confidence may speak  
 To man, and show clear tokens for his tale.

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. Strangers, say whatso needeth. Here have we  
 All that beseemeth such a house as this—  
 Warm baths, beds, all that charms away the pain  
 Of toil, observance of all courtesy.  
 If aught of weightier import needs to do,  
 This were for men, with whom we will confer.  
 ORESTES. A Daulian stranger I, from Phocis come.  
 As, bearing mine own needments, on I fared  
 To Argos—whither now my feet have won—  
 A man I knew not met me who knew not him,  
 And asked my way, and told his own, and named him  
 Strophius the Phocian, in our conference, saying:  
 ‘Since thou to Argos goest in any wise,  
 Say to his parents—mark with diligent heed—  
 This—“Dead Orestes is:” forget it not.  
 If then it please his friends to bring him home,  
 Or in a strange land, exiled evermore,  
 To bury, bring back word as they command;  
 For now in brazen sides the funeral urn  
 Hideth his dust, his dues of mourning paid.’  
 So heard I, so I tell: if now I speak  
 Unto his house’s heads and to his kin,  
 I know not; but it fits his sire should know.  
 KLYTEMNESTRA. Ah me! thy tale our utter ruin tells!  
 Curse of this house, O wrestler none may quell,  
 Aimer at prey from thy range well withdrawn,  
 Archer whose bow unerring slays from far,  
 Thou stripp’st me bare of dear ones—hapless me!  
 And now Orestes—ah, so wisely, he deemed,  
 He kept his foot clear of destruction’s slough!—  
 Him, Hope the Healer, born to purge these halls  
 Of the Fiends’ Revel, him thou writ’st down—thus!  
 ORESTES. In sooth, fain had I to such princely hosts  
 As bearer of glad tidings made me known,  
 And my guest-welcome so had earned: for what  
 Is kindlier than the tie of guest and host?  
 Yet to my thought it seemed an impious deed  
 To do not this sad service to his friends

When I had promised, and was greeted guest.

KLYTEMNESTRA. None the less worthy thee shall be thy welcome,

Nor less the house shall hold thee for its friend.

Another had brought the tidings, hadst thou not.

But now 'tis time that guests who all day long

Have journeyed far, be graced with service meet.

(*To steward.*) Lead him to our guest-chambers dight for men,

With these his thralls and fellow-wayfarers;

There be their tendance as beseems our house.

This do, as who shall give account to me.

But I will tell this to the house's lord;

And—for we are not all bereft of friends—

We will take counsel touching this mischance.

[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS. When, O ye handmaids leal to the house, shall we lift up on high

Strength of our voices, to shout for Orestes the good-speed cry?

Mighty Ones, Earth, and thou Grave-mound which over the body art laid

Of a king, of a captain of ships, now hearken, now come to our aid!

Now is it time, full time is it now, that with us be allied

Suasion of Guile, and that Underworld Hermes of Darkness be guide

To him who shall enter the strife which the slaughtering sword shall decide.

*Enter NURSE.*

Meseems the stranger bringeth grief with him:

Lo, yonder weeping comes Orestes' nurse.

Whither away, Kilissa, through the gates?

No hireling sorrow fareth forth with thee.

NURSE. Our lady biddeth summon with all speed

Ægisthus to her guests, that plainlier,

As man from man, he may enquire of them

Touching these tidings. From her household-thralls

Brows lowering veiled the laughter in her eyes,

Hiding her joy for what hath happened so well

For her, but for this house all-wretchedly,

By this the strangers' tale—alas, too plain!

Ah, glad at heart shall he be, hearing this,

Soon as he learns the story. Woe is me!

How all the mingled troubles of the past,

So hard to bear, that here in Atreus' halls

Befell, wrung in my breast this heart of mine!

But never pang like this have I endured.

All ills beside with patience still I bore:

But dear Orestes, love-load on my heart,

Whom from his mother I received and nursed—

Oft his shrill nightly summons broke my sleep:

Ay, many a fruitless hardship I endured:

For the unreasoning babe, like some young beast,

Sooth, must ye rear with mother-wit for guide;  
 For no speech hath the child in swaddling-clothes  
 To tell of hunger, thirst, or nature's need;  
 And straight the young frame heeds the imperious call.  
 Forewarned hereof, yet oft-times caught, I wot,  
 Unwares, 'twas mine to cleanse his swathing-bands;  
 So had the nurse the fuller's office too.  
 Such twofold handicraft I took on me  
 When I received Orestes for his sire.

And now I hear—woe's me!—that he is dead.

And to the man I go, who hath defiled

This house, and who shall hear this tale with joy!

CHORUS. How furnished, prithee, doth she bid him come?

NURSE. How?—say it again, that I may understand.

CHORUS. To come with guards encompassed, or alone?

NURSE. She bids him bring his spearman-retinue.

CHORUS. Bear no such message to our hated lord!

Bid him alone come, and mistrustless hear,

Yea, come with all speed with a joyful mind.

'Crooked is set straight in the messenger's heart.'

NURSE. How now?—Art thou for these their tidings glad?

CHORUS. What if Zeus turn to triumph this disaster?

NURSE. How should he—and our hope Orestes dead?

CHORUS. Not yet—this might the sorriest seer divine.

NURSE. What say'st thou? Know'st thou more than meets the ear?

CHORUS. Go, bear thy message. That enjoined thee, do.

The Gods take care for that for which they care.

NURSE. Nay then, I go, and will obey thy words;

And by the Gods' grace may all good betide.

[Exit.

(Str. 1)

CHORUS. Now in prayer to thee I call, Zeus Father, Lord of all

The Gods Olympian, prosper us, who yearn to see the Right

In triumph stand assured o'er the wrong so long endured.

All my cry is but for justice, Zeus: protect him with thy might!

(Str. 2)

Ah, do thou, Zeus, of thy grace, but bring him face to face

With his foes in yonder palace, in iniquity's stronghold;

For, if thou exalt him high, he shall render joyfully

Requit of thank-offerings twice and three times over told.

(Ant. 1)

Think on him thou heldest dear: ah, behold his scion here

To a chariot yoked of peril:—O set his course a goal!

Oh to see his rushing feet keeping time and measure meet,

Straining down the course to victory, upheld by thy control!

Hearth-gods, who have your shrine where the house's treasures shine, (*Str.* 3)  
 Hear, all-propitious, hear! Exact atonement for the blood  
 Of men murdered long ago! Lo, the murder old is grown;  
 No more within yon palace may it spawn a cursèd brood!

(*Mesode.*)

O Dweller in dark halls 'twixt thy chasm's massy walls,  
 Vouchsafe the hero's house may now uplift its head once more,  
 May look with loyal eyes bright in the new sunrise  
 From out the veil of darkness that hath hung its face before.

(*Ant.* 3)

Oh be Maia's Son allied, as right is, on our side,  
 Who can speed an emprise onward like a ship before the wind,  
 He who prompts the word that throws darkness o'er the eyes of foes,  
 Till they stumble in the daylight whom his craft has stricken blind.

(*Str.* 4)

Then at last will we upraise for deliverance songs of praise,  
 And will banish all the wailing of the trembling chords of fear.  
 O then shall all be well; and my gain, ah, who shall tell  
 When the curse is done away from them my heart holds dear?

(*Ant.* 2)

O be stout of heart, my son, when the deed is to be done!  
 She will shriek to thee, 'My child!' so to paralyse thine hand:  
 Then shout thy father's name o'er the deed his blood doth claim:  
 Then consummate the ruin wherein blameless thou dost stand.

(*Ant.* 4)

Thine be Perseus' heart, whose sword with monster-women warred,  
 When thou wrakest bitter vengeance for thy loved ones underground,  
 And for them on earth, to slake Ruin's blood-thirst for their sake,  
 And when the doom-deviser hath in thee destruction found.

*Enter ÆGISTHUS.*

ÆGISTHUS. Summoned by messenger express I come.  
 I hear how certain strangers hitherward  
 Faring, have brought us tidings nowise glad,  
 Orestes' death. To charge the house therewith  
 Were laying a terror-raining murder-load  
 On one yet gashed and festering with old wounds.  
 How shall I know that this is truth unfeigned?  
 Is it but women's panic-struck report  
 That leaps like flame, and dies down leaving nought?  
 What can ye tell, that I be certified?

CHORUS. We have heard—but pass thou in, and of thy guests  
 Make question. Nothing-worth are hearsay-tales  
 When man may question of a man himself.

ÆGISTHUS. Myself will see and sift the messenger,  
 Whether himself was there, and saw his death,

Or speaketh but from some vague rumour heard.

My mind's keen vision shall he not delude.

[Exit.

CHORUS. O Zeus, O Zeus, what shall I say, and where

Make a beginning with the vow and prayer?

How shall my words, with utmost loyal intent,

Rise to the height of this great argument?

Now are the keen blades, sped on murderous mission,

Bloodstained, at point to try the grim decision—

Perish shall Agamemnon's house, descending

Down into ruin utter and unending?

Or shall Orestes kindle a beacon-light

For freedom and the lawful rule of Right,

And hold his father's wealth of empery?

O mighty strife wherein with these two foes

He, sole avenger of the slain, shall close

In wrestle of death—for victory may it be!

ÆGISTHUS. (*within*) Ah-h! *woe is me!*

CHORUS. Ha!—hist!—the cry of one!

How goes it?—what in yon halls now is done?

Stand we aloof while this deed is achieved,

That men may hold us guiltless of these ills;

For the fight's issue is decided now.

*Enter SERVANT.*

SERVANT. Alas and well-a-day for my dead lord!

Woe and alas! and thrice-alas I cry!

Ægisthus is no more! Fling wide the gates

With all speed, and unbar the doors that keep

The women's bowers!—There want young sinews here—

Not to defend him who is sped—what help?

Ho there!—I hail the deaf, and vainly cry

To sleepers! Whither is Klytemnestra gone?

What doth she?—Now is her neck like to fall—

'Neath Justice' sword—the edge hangs imminent!

*Enter KLYTEMNESTRA.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. What now? What clamour wak'st thou in the halls?

MESSENGER. The dead are slaying the living!—*this* I say.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Ah me! I understand thy riddling speech!

By guile we perish, even as we slew!

Give me—quick, give a warrior-quelling axe:

Let see if now I shall prevail or fall;

For to this desperate issue am I come.

*Enter ORESTES.*

ORESTES. Thee too I seek: for him, it is enough.



KLYTEMNESTRA. Ah me!—thou art dead, Ægisthus best-beloved!

ORESTES. Lov'st thou the man?—thou in one grave with him  
Shalt lie. In death shalt thou forsake him never.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Forbear, my son! Revere this, O my child,  
This breast, whereon thou oft hast slumbered, whence  
Thy lips the while drew life-sustaining milk.

ORESTES. Pylades, must my reverence spare my mother?

PYLADES. Where then were Loxias' sun-clear oracles  
Uttered at Pytho, and thy plighted oaths?

Rather have all the world thy foes than Heaven.

ORESTES. I adjudge thee victor: thou exhortest well.

Come: by his very side will I slay thee.

Living, thou held'st him dearer than my sire:

Sleep with him in thy death, since thou dost love

This man, and hatest whom thou ought'st to love.

KLYTEMNESTRA. I nursed thee—O let me grow old with thee!

ORESTES. My father's murderess!—shalt thou dwell with me?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Fate was accomplice in those deeds, my child.

ORESTES. Yea, Fate the while for thee prepared this doom.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Nought dost thou dread a mother's curse, O child?

ORESTES. My mother cast me forth to misery.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Nay, to a home of friends she sped thee forth.

ORESTES. Twice sold was I, a freeborn father's son!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Sold?—and what price did I receive for thee?

ORESTES. I shame to utter its reproach to thee!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Thy father's sins—spare not to tell them, too!

ORESTES. Sitter at home, accuse not him who toils!

KLYTEMNESTRA. Hard is the lot of wives deserted, child.

ORESTES. They sit at home, and by their lord's toil live.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Thou seemest set to slay, O son, thy mother!

ORESTES. Thou wilt be slayer of thyself, not I.

KLYTEMNESTRA. See to it—'ware the mother's Vengeance-hounds!

ORESTES. How should I 'scape my father's, if I spared?

KLYTEMNESTRA. Living, I wail as to a tomb—in vain!

ORESTES. My father's fate wafts unto thee this doom.

KLYTEMNESTRA. Woe's me, who bore this serpent and who nursed!

ORESTES. Prophet indeed was that thy dream-born fear—

Unnatural murderess, die the unnatural death!

[Exit, dragging KLYTEMNESTRA within.]

CHORUS. O but I wail the misery of these twain!

Yet, since to blood-guilt's topmost peak hath climbed

Hapless Orestes, rather this I choose

Than that the house's hope in ruin fell.

(Str. I)

On the children of Priam came heavy-handed

Justice, exacting the penalty-pain;



So to Agamemnon's halls came the banded  
 Leash of lions, the war-gods twain;  
 And the exile who followed the Pythian vision,  
 Whom a God sped forth on his vengeance-mission—  
 He hath come to his own: all, all doth he gain!

(Str. 2)

Raise gladsome acclaim for the house of our masters  
 Escaped from the curse, from the spoiling of wasters,  
 Escaped from the path of an evil fate  
 Whereon the defilers dragged it so late!

(Ant. 1)

Down swoopeth the guileful Retribution  
 On the caitiff who shrinks from open fight;  
 But her champion's hand mid the strife's confusion  
 She grasped—Zeus' Daughter, whom Justice and Right  
 We mortals name who fitly before her  
 Bend, with acceptable prayers to adore her—  
 And the breath of her wrath did the foe's strength blight.

(Str. 3)

So hath Loxias, Lord of Parnassus, striven,  
 From where on its crest is his mighty shrine,  
 With her unto whom long respite was given,  
 Who at last is enmeshed in the net divine.  
 O yea, on the Gods by their nature is laid  
 A constraint, that the wicked they may not aid.  
 It is meet to adore the Lords of Heaven,  
 For at last upon us doth the dayspring shine.

(Ant. 2)

The curb from the lips of the thrall is taken!  
 Lift up thine head, house long forsaken  
 Of freedom! Long, O long didst thou bend  
 Crushed to the earth as it seemed without end.

(Ant. 3)

Time, all-fulfiller, in swift revolution  
 Shall come to the house, when far off flies  
 From the hearth of it banished all the pollution  
 By curse-dispelling sacrifice;  
 And fair-faced fortunes and gracious-eyed  
 To the alien sojourners there shall betide  
 Once more, after all that long confusion:  
 Yea, at last upon us doth the dayspring rise!

*The scene opens, and ORESTES is seen standing beside the bodies of  
 ÆGISTHUS and KLYTEMNESTRA.*

ORESTES. Behold ye these two tyrants of the land,  
 My father's slayers who made his home a ruin.

Worship had they, once sitting on the throne:  
 They are lovers yet, as shows the fate they share,  
 And their oath-plight abides unbroken yet.  
 They plighted oath to slay mine hapless sire,  
 And be in death one—and the oath is kept.  
 Mark yet again, O hearers of these woes,

*(holds up the robe in which AGAMEMNON was entangled at his murder)*

This death-gin, snare that trapped my hapless sire,  
 Gyves for his hands, linked shackles for his feet!  
 Unfold it wide, and in a ring stand round  
 To show a king's shroud, that the Sire may see—  
 Not mine, but He that on all this looks down,  
 The Sun-god—see my mother's foul, foul deeds,  
 That he may stand my witness at the bar  
 That on my mother righteously I wreaked  
 This doom—I speak not of Ægisthus' doom:  
 He hath the adulterer's lawful punishment—  
 Who for her lord devised this hateful thing,  
 For him whose children 'neath her zone she bare,  
 Who loved her once, now hate, as all may see.  
 What think ye is she?—a sea-snake, or a viper,  
 Whose touch blasts even him who 'scapes her fangs,  
 If reckless daring, venomous spite, can slay.  
 How shall I call this thing, and name aright?  
 A wild-beast snare?—the curtain of a bath  
 Muffling a dead man's feet?—O nay, a net!  
 Toils and foot-tangling vestures call thou these.  
 Such thing as this some robber might possess  
 To trap the stranger, one that practiseth  
 A life of rapine, killing by this snare  
 Many, and makes his soul a forge of hell.  
 Never in mine home may such woman live.  
 With me! God grant me childless death ere then!

CHORUS. Alas for the piteous deed! Alas!

By a ghastly death thou hast been laid low;  
 And for him that remaineth alive is anguish flowerlike blooming.  
 ORESTES. Wrought she that crime or no? My witness be  
 This robe, incarnadined by Ægisthus' sword.  
 The dark blood-smear hath wrought with time's long lapse  
 To mar the dye-hues of the broidered work.  
 His praises now I speak, now wail his death,  
 Crying to this, my father's murder-web.  
 Deeds, sufferings I lament, yea, all mine house—  
 I, with this victory's loathed pollution stained!

CHORUS. No man of the sons of earth shall pass

Through his whole life's journey unscathed of woe.  
 Now is one disaster upon us: now near is a second looming.  
 ORESTES. Nay, know ye—for the end I cannot see—  
 As in a chariot-race I am swerving wide  
 Out of the course. I am hurried helpless on  
 By reinless thoughts. Upon my heart broods Fear  
 Ready to sing and dance her fury-dance!  
 But, ere my reason goes, I tell my friends—  
 Tell them, I slew my mother righteously,  
 The foul thing, loathed of Gods, that slew my sire.  
 He whose spells drew me to this deed, I claim,  
 Was Pytho's prophet Loxias, who foretold  
 That, doing it, I should be clear of blame;  
 Refraining—I name not the penalty:—  
 Some pangs outrange imagination's bow.  
 Now look on me, how, with this suppliant bough  
 And wreath arrayed, on earth's mid-navel stone  
 I shall sit down, on Loxias' holy floor,  
 By the altar-fire they name the Undying Flame,  
 Fleeing this taint of kindred blood:—no hearth  
 Save his alone, did Loxias bid me seek.  
 I bid all Argives in the days to be  
 Witness that not in cruelty I slew.  
 So I, a homeless wanderer from this land,  
 Living and dying leave this fame for mine.  
 CHORUS. Nay, thou hast done well: yoke not thou thy lips  
 To words ill-omened: bode not horrors thou.  
 Freedom hast thou unto all Argos given,  
 Whose swift stroke lopped the heads of serpents twain.  
 ORESTES. Ha!—Handmaid women, there in Gorgon guise  
 They come with sable robes and hair enwreathed  
 With tangled snakes! I can no longer stay.  
 CHORUS. What fancies, O most duteous of all sons,  
 Rack thee? Stand firm—fear not, in victory's hour.  
 ORESTES. No fancied shapes these my tormentors are!  
 These are my mother's hell-hounds manifest.  
 CHORUS. Yet fresh-spilt is the blood upon thine hands;  
 Therefrom distraction falleth on thy soul.  
 ORESTES. O King Apollo! lo, they swarm, they swarm!  
 The loathly blood is dripping from their eyes!  
 CHORUS. Haste to where cleansing waits: to Loxias cling.  
 He from these agonies shall set thee free.  
 ORESTES. Ye, ye behold not these, but I behold!  
 I am hunted hence—I can no longer stay!  
 CHORUS. Blessing go with thee! God look graciously  
 On thee, and guard unto some happier lot!

[Exit.]

Lo, how upon the palace royal hath burst  
The third storm that fulfils the house's fate!  
First, wretch Thyestes at a feast accurst  
Of his own children ate:

Then shrieked the second storm the agony  
Of that king in that laver hacked to death,  
When the Achaïans' chief to treachery  
There yielded up his breath:

Now on the third storm's wild wings down doth sweep  
A Saviour—or a Doom shall he be named?  
Where shall the Curse end?—how be lulled to sleep  
Its fury?—how be tamed?

[*Exeunt.*]



# THE EUMENIDES,

or

THE RECONCILIATION.

## ARGUMENT.

BECAUSE *Orestes* had slain his mother, the *Avengers of Kindred Blood*, the *Spirits which are named Erinyes, and Eumenides, and Furies*, haunted him evermore, chasing him from land to land. Though he had but done the bidding of the *Oracle of Apollo*, and had been purified, with all due rites, from the guilt of blood, they would not be appeased, but pursued after him day and night, with intent to wear and waste away his life, and thereafter to torment him in death for ever.

And herein is told how he came to his last refuge, and was set on his trial before the Powers of Heaven and of Hell, and before men, and of the great propitiation that was made.

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APOLLO.

ATHENA.

ORESTES, son of *Agamemnon* and slayer of his mother.

GHOST OF KLYTEMNESTRA.

PRIESTESS of the *Oracle at Delphi*.

THE JUDGES, twelve burghers of *Athens*.

CHORUS, consisting of the twelve *Eumenides, or Furies*.

SCENE: 1st, the Temple of *Apollo* at *Delphi*.

2nd, the Temple of *Athena* at *Athens*.

3rd, the *Areopagus* at *Athens*.

*In front of the door of the temple. Enter the PRIESTESS.*

PRIESTESS. Chief place in this my prayer I give to Earth  
First Prophetess; and unto *Themis* next,  
Who second sat on this her mother's throne  
Of prophecy, as saith the legend, Third,  
By her consent—constraint was none therein—  
*Phœbê*, another Titan child of Earth,  
Was throned thereon, and she her birth-gift gave  
To *Phœbus*, who from *Phœbê* hath his name.  
So left he *Delos*' mere and rocky ridge,  
Landed on *Pallas*' ship-frequented shores,  
And came to this land, to *Parnassus*' shrine,



Whither the Fire-god's sons with reverent feet  
 Escorted him, the men that through the waste  
 His highway made, and tamed the savage earth.  
 So came he with high worship of our folk  
 And Delphos, king and helmsman of this land.  
 And Zeus with inspiration filled his soul,  
 And seated him fourth Prophet on the throne,  
 Loxias, interpreter of Father Zeus.  
 To these Gods I put up my prelude-prayer.  
 And Temple-warder Pallas hath mine homage.  
 The Nymphs I reverence, by Korykia's rock  
 Bird-loved that dwell, the caverned haunt of Gods.  
 And Bromius dwells here—I forget not him—  
 Since the God led his Bacchanals to war,  
 And to his doom snared Pentheus, like a hare.  
 On Pleistus' fountains, on Poseidon's might  
 I call, on Zeus most high, the Accomplisher.  
 So sit I down on my prophetic chair.  
 Vouchsafe ye me a better entrance now  
 Than all before! What Greeks soe'er be here,  
 Let them by lot draw nigh, as custom bids:  
 For as the God guides, so I prophesy.

*Enters the temple. Comes tottering forth, clinging for support to walls and pillars.*

O dread to tell, O dread for eyes to see,  
 That which hath driven me back from Loxias' halls,  
 So strengthless that I cannot lift my steps,  
 Trailed by mine hands forth, sped not by my feet!  
 Age terror-thrilled is naught, is as a babe.  
 Into the crypt with garlands hung I passed—  
 There on the Navel-stone one god-accurst  
 I saw, in suppliant posture seated: blood  
 Dripped from his hands: a sword that seemed new-drawn  
 He grasped, and held an olive's topmost spray  
 All duly twined with wool-strands passing long  
 From snowy fleece:—my tale thus far is clear.  
 But lo, in front of this man a strange troop  
 Of women sleepeth on the chairs of stone—  
 Not women—Gorgons rather name I them;  
 Yet not to Gorgon-shapes I liken these.  
 Once saw I pictured Harpies bearing off  
 The meat of Phineus—yet were these unwinged,  
 Swart-hued and hideous-wrought in every part.  
 Their breath out-snoring blasts whoe'er draw nigh;

And from their eyes drips down a loathly rheum.  
 Their vesture it were sacrilege to bring  
 Before Gods' statues, or to homes of men.  
 No tribe whence such a crew could spring I have seen,  
 Nor land that boasts, 'I have reared, uncursed thereby,  
 This brood, nor wailed disaster born of them.'  
 Let mighty Loxias, master of this fane,  
 Himself see to the issue of these things:  
 For he is Healer-prophet, Portent-seer,  
 Pollution-banisher even from others' homes.

*Scene opens, disclosing inner temple. ORESTES clasping omphalos. FURIES sleeping.*

*Enter APOLLO and HERMES.*

APOLLO. I never will forsake thee. To the end  
 I ward thee, standing nigh or far-withdrawn,  
 And to thy foes ungentle will I be.  
 Even now thou seest these ravin-demons trapped:  
 They are fallen on sleep, yon maidens all-abhorred,  
 Night's ancient children, with whom none of Gods  
 Hath commerce, no, nor ever man nor brute.  
 They are made for evil only, for they dwell  
 In evil gloom and nether Tartarus,  
 The hate of men and Gods Olympian.  
 Howbeit flee thou: let thy strength not fail;  
 For they will chase thee o'er far-stretching lands,  
 Ever as tramp the earth thy wandering feet,  
 And pass the sea and surf-ringed island-towns.  
 Yet faint not, thus, like some hard-driven steer,  
 On-goaded; but to Pallas' city go:  
 Clasp her ancient image seat thee there.  
 There will we find us judges of thy cause,  
 And words of suasion: so will we devise  
 Thy full deliverance from these sufferings,  
 For I, I thrust thee on to slay thy mother.  
 ORESTES. O King Apollo, thou canst do no wrong;  
 And, being such, do thou forget me not.  
 Thy power is all-sufficient for mine aid.  
 APOLLO. Remember: let not fear thine heart o'ercome.  
 And thou, my brother by the selfsame Sire,  
 Hermes, protect him. To thy surname true  
 Be guide to him: lead as a shepherd on  
 My suppliant. Zeus respects that sanctity  
 Of outlaws, which thine escort lends to men.

*[Exeunt APOLLO, HERMES, and ORESTES.]*

GHOST OF KLYTEMNESTRA *rises, and bends over the sleeping Furies.*

KLYTEMNESTRA. Ay, slumber on! What do ye thus to sleep?  
 And I the while, thus set at nought of you,  
 Amidst the dead am made a laughing-stock,  
 A scorn of scorns, because of him I slew!  
 In shame I wander: yea, I tell you this,  
 That of the dead I am bitterly reviled.  
 Though nearest kin dealt me this hideous wrong,  
 None of the Gods is angered for my sake—  
 For me, butchered by matricidal hands!  
 Look on these stabs, in thine heart's vision look,  
 For in sleep lightened are the spirit's eyes:  
 By day the soul's prophetic gift doth fail.  
 Ha, oft have ye lapped up mine offerings,  
 Bowls—not of wine, but sober soothing gifts;  
 Night-solemn feasts upon your hearth I burned  
 At such an hour as no God claims beside.  
 And all these see I trampled underfoot!  
 He hath 'scaped you; like a fawn, clean gone is he,  
 Ay, lightly from the midst of these your toils  
 Hath sped, with curling lips of utter scorn.  
 Harken to mine appeal for my soul's sake!  
 Give heed, O Goddesses of Nethergloom!  
 Klytemnestra calls you—now a bodiless dream!

CHORUS *mutter in sleep.*

Ay, mutter on! Your prey afar is fled!  
 Ha, friends hath he—not broken reeds like mine!

CHORUS *mutter in sleep.*

O'er-sound thy sleep is—me thou pitiest not.  
 Gone is Orestes, slayer of his mother!

CHORUS *moan in sleep.*

Thou moanest, slumberest—wilt not straightway rise?  
 What hast thou ever done save fashion evil?

CHORUS *moan in sleep.*

Slumber and ache of toil, conspirators  
 Potent, have quelled the fearful dragon's strength.

CHORUS *break repeatedly into frenzied muttering.*

CHORUS. Seize, seize him, seize him, seize him! Ha, take heed!  
 KLYTEMNESTRA. Chasing in dreams the prey—still giving tongue,  
 Like hound that ceaseth not to hunt in sleep!

What dost thou?—rise! Let toil not quell thy strength,  
 Let sleep not lull thee to forget my grief:  
 Let thy soul writhe beneath my just reproach,  
 For to the wise upbraidings are as goads.  
 Waft thou thy breath in spray of blood on him;  
 Blast him with fire-reek blazing from thy womb.  
 Chase—wither with pursuit renewed his strength.

GHOST *descends*

*The FURIES one by one start up from sleep.*

CHORUS. Arouse—arouse thou her, as I rouse thee!  
 Ha! slumbering still?—arise!—spurn sleep from thee!  
 Let us see if this prelude peals in vain.

(*Str. 1*)

Woe for us! Out on it! Friends, with what anguish of toil have we wrought—  
 Manifold anguish endured, and have wasted our strength for nought—  
 Anguish and wrong unendurable!—Out on it! well-a-day!  
 Out of the toils hath he slipped; O, the quarry hath stolen away!  
 Sleep-overcome was my vigilant watch—I have lost the prey!

(*Ant. 1*)

Scion of Zeus, art a filcher, a thief!—ho, I taunt thee with crime!  
 Youngling thou hast overridden divinities hoary as time!—  
 Ay, hast regarded thy suppliant, the godless, unnatural son,  
 Stolen the matricide out of our clutch—this thy god-head hath done!  
 Who shall stand up for thee—say that by justice this vantage was won?

(*Str. 2*)

Me the reproaches that burst through the midst of the dreams of the night  
 Stung like a chariot-goad by the midst of the shaft grasped tight;  
 Ay, through mine heart and my liver I felt the ghost-hand smite.  
 Writhing am I as one writhes 'neath the merciless scourger's hand,  
 Lashed in the market-place by command of the lords of the land,  
 Shivers and swoons, while the cold sweat-beads on his white face stand.

(*Ant. 2*)

Such are the deeds that they do, these upstart gods of an hour!  
 Such is their utter defiance of justice in using their power!  
 Lo, what a blood-clot, that drips with a very murder-shower,  
 Crimsons him, head to foot!—ye may see how the Navel-stone,  
 Pivot and centre of earth, is defiled, for thereover is thrown  
 Hideous pollution of bloodshed: the holy unholy is grown!

(*Str. 3*)

Prophet, thou surely hast taken the curse, whose pollution doth rest  
 Dark on that house; on thy shrine hast thou thrust it, thine own bidden guest.  
 Contrariwise to the wont of the Gods thou regardest man,  
 Crushest the Fates which were born of old when time began.

(*Ant. 3*)

Yea, unto me is he tyrannous: yet shall he set him not free!  
 Ha, though he flee 'neath the earth, delivered he shall not be!

He, the polluted, shall find there another avenger of guilt  
Waiting to wreak on his head the curse of the blood he hath spilt.

*Enter APOLLO.*

APOLLO. Out! I command you, from these halls with speed  
Depart—begone from my prophetic shrines,  
Lest, feeling the winged flashing serpent's sting  
As from the golden-plaited string it leaps,  
Thou void for anguish black foam sucked from men,  
Vomiting gouts of slaughter gorged by thee.  
It fits not that ye touch these halls of mine.

Go where revenges cleave heads, gouge out eyes,  
Where slaughters reek, where perisheth manhood's seed  
From outraged boyhood's bloom, feet, hands, are lopped,  
Where stones rain death, where long moans piteously  
Burst from the wretch impaled:—ha, hear ye now  
What festival, O demons god-abhorred,  
Is your delight? Therewith your form's whole fashion  
Accordeth! A blood-lapping lion's cave  
Might such inhabit fitlier, not pollute  
By your foul presence this my sanctuary.  
Hence, beasts by keeper never shepherded!  
Herd whereof none is pleasing to the Gods!

CHORUS. O King Apollo, hearken thou in turn.

In this deed none with thee doth share the blame:  
Thyself didst all; the guilt is wholly thine.

APOLLO. How, prithee? Thus far lengthen out thy speech.

CHORUS. Thine oracle made thy guest a matricide.

APOLLO. Mine oracle bade avenge his sire—what then?

CHORUS. Thou promisedst shelter to him—red from murder!

APOLLO. Yea, bade him flee for refuge to these halls.

CHORUS. And us, who dogged him hither, dost revile?

APOLLO. Yea, for mine house is not for you to approach.

CHORUS. But our appointed work, our right, is this.

APOLLO. Your rights?—ay, vaunt your high prerogative!

CHORUS. We chase the mother-slayers from their homes.

APOLLO. What of the wife that murdereth her lord?

CHORUS. That is no blood of kin by kindred shed.

APOLLO. Lo, thou dishonourest, hold'st as nothing-worth,  
The troth that Hera hallowed, wedding Zeus.

An outcast by thy plea is Kypris made,  
Of whom the ties most dear to mortals spring.

For marriage fate-ordained for man and wife,  
Warded by Justice, mightier is than oaths.

And if thou slack thine hand from punishing  
When these their yokemates slay, nor look in wrath,



Wrongfully, say I, dost thou hunt Orestes.

Against this sin I mark thee fiercely rage,

By that unruffled, all the world may see.

But Goddess Pallas shall see justice done.

CHORUS. Ne'er will I cease from haunting yonder man!

APOLLO. O yea, pursue!—so get to thee more toil.

CHORUS. Curtail not thou mine honours by thy speech!

APOLLO. Thine honours!—as a gift not mine be they!

CHORUS. O yea, great art thou named by Zeus's throne!

But I—for a mother's blood aye draws me on—

Claim him for punishment, still hunt him down.

APOLLO. But I will shield and save my suppliant.

For men and Gods account a fearful thing

The wrath of suppliants wilfully betrayed.

*Scene changes to Temple of ATHENA at Athens. ORESTES discovered clinging to her statue.*

ORESTES. Athena, Queen, by Loxias' commands

I come. Be gracious to a hunted wretch,

Whose stain is not unpurged from hands uncleansed,

But dulled by now, yea, vesture-like worn thin

By touch of homes and paths of other men.

Far-journeying alike o'er land and sea,

Heeding the hests of Loxias' oracles,

Goddess, thine house, thine image, have I reached;

And here, till Justice speak my doom, I wait.

*Enter CHORUS.*

CHORUS. Ha! lo you there, the man's slot plain to see!

Follow the tokens of the voiceless guide!

For, as the hound pursues the wounded fawn,

By blood-spot and by foam-fleck track we him.

With manifold strength-outwearing toil hard pants

Mine heart; for all earth have we quested o'er,

And o'er the sea with wingless hoverings

I came pursuing, by no ship outsped.

And now he cowereth somewhere hidden nigh.

Ha! blithely it greets me—scent of human blood!

Watch, O watch with sleepless care,

Peering here and glancing there,

Lest the unpunished matricide

Flee by speed, by cunning hide.

Lo there once more!—protection hath he found!

Clasping the immortal Goddess' image round

He claims the right of trial of his guilt.



This may not be: a mother's life-blood spilt

On earth, may not be gathered up again:

'Tis past recall, once poured upon the plain.

Nay, I shall suck—thou canst not choose but pay the penalty—

The red gore from thy living limbs, and win me out of thee

The banquet of a draught that shall with awful anguish flow.

Yea, I will waste thy living frame, then drag thee far below,

There to pay all thy penalty, the mother-murderer's woe.

So shall all else that have transgressed,

Have sinned against a God, a guest,

Or parents, mark how each receives

The dues of sin that Justice gives.

For Hades 'neath the earth waits every soul,

A mighty judge who watcheth to enroll

All sins on his eternal memory's roll.

ORESTES. I, lessoned in misfortune's school, have learnt

Full many a cleansing rite, have learnt when Law

Requireth speech, or silence; and herein

By a wise teacher's bidding do I speak.

Lo, the blood sleeps and fades upon mine hand,

And matricide's pollution is washed clean.

For, when it yet was fresh, at Phœbus' hearth

'Twas banished by ablutions of slain swine.

Long were the tale, from its beginning told,

Of all I have visited, nor brought them harm.

Time cleanseth all things, aging as they age.

And now with pure lips piously I call

Upon Athena, this land's Queen, to come

Mine helper: so without war shall she win

Myself, my land, and Argos' folk, for hers,

Her loyal ally ever, by just right.

Be she in regions of far Libya-land

By Triton's flow, the stream that gave her birth,

Erect, or throned with vesture-veiled foot,

Armed for friends' aid, or over Phlegra's plain

Like some bold captain darts she an eagle-glance—

Let her, as Goddess, hear from far, and come,

Come, to be my deliverer from these ills.

CHORUS. Thee nor Apollo, nor Athena's might

Shall save from perishing, an outcast thing,

A soul that hath forgot the taste of joy,

A prey by fiends sucked bloodless, a thin wraith! . . .

Dost thou reply not? Dost thou spurn my words?—

Thou, for me nourished, unto me devoted?

Slain on no altar, thou shalt feast me alive,

Shalt hear the hymn that charms thee by this spell:—

Sisters, weave we now the dance:  
 Now 'tis time to chant our song,  
 Chant the ghastly doom of wrong:  
 Publish now the ordinance  
 This our band for men doth frame:—  
 We unbending justice claim.  
 They whose hands no guilt imbrues,  
 No such men our wrath pursues;  
 Scatheless on through life they win.  
 When they, like this man of sin,  
 Cover hands that murders stain,  
 Righteous champions of the slain,  
 Blood-avengers, we attend,  
 Haunting them unto the end.

(Str. 1)

Mother, who didst bear me, Mother Night, a vengeance ever near  
 Unto men bereft of life-light, men yet seeing light, O hear!  
 Me the son of Leto doth dishonour, from mine hands would fain  
 Wrest this cowerer, mine atonement-victim for a mother slain!  
 Ha, but o'er our slaughtered victim hear our chant triumphant ring!—  
 Madness, frenzy soul-destroying, is the hymn the Erinyes sing,  
 Soul-enchaining, lyreless, blasting mortal frames and withering!

(Ant. 1)

This our lot and portion is, the thread by Doom the unswerving spun  
 For our sure prerogative—that mortals by whose hands are done  
 Impious murders, aye we haunt them till they sink into the grave.  
 Yea, and 'neath the earth our bondmen are they: none shall help nor save.  
 Ay, and o'er our slaughtered victim hear our chant triumphant ring!—  
 Madness, frenzy soul-destroying, is the hymn the Erinyes sing,  
 Soul-enchaining, lyreless, blasting mortal frames and withering!

(Str. 2)

In the hour that beheld our being begun  
 Were these our prerogatives ratified:  
 No dealings have we with Immortals; none  
 Will deign at the banquet to sit by our side:  
 No part nor lot for ever have I  
 In white robes' glistening radiancy;  
 But we take for our portion the desolation  
 Of homes which are made Strife's habitation:  
 When the hand is with life-blood of kin made red,  
 Then hunt we the slayer; our strength shall outlast him,  
 Be he never so swift; we o'ertake him, we blast him  
 By the power of the blood ever-fresh he hath shed.

(Ant. 2)

And we give all diligence hereunto  
 That our burden shall be from the Gods afar

Removed, that the vengeance-quest be our due,  
 That the kin-slayer stand not before their bar.  
 The blood-streaming abhorred ones doth Zeus disallow;  
 He hears not their prayer, he rejecteth their vow.  
 Then we, from our ambush of cloud down-flashing,  
 With a leap as of lions bring down the crashing  
 Might of our feet on the wretch as he flies,  
 With the clutch of our talons to earthward flinging  
 The limbs that the strength of terror is winging—  
 Lo, crushed under ruin resistless he lies!

(Str. 3)

Imaginations proudly swelling of men beneath the free sky dwelling  
 Deep under earth shall shrivel shame-abased,  
 Soon as our onrush shall have found them, soon as our black robes sweep  
 around them  
 In measures that our vengeful feet have paced.

(Ant. 3)

The wretch sin-wildered falls, unknowing whence comes his sudden over-  
 throwing,  
 Above him drifts such pestilence of gloom,  
 While voices multitudinous-groaning their wrongs against his house are  
 moaning,  
 Whose breath is blackness of the mist of doom.

(Str. 4)

Law abideth everlasting: cunning are we, and unfailing  
 Workers of its sentence, awful sin-recorders: unavailing  
 With us is prayer.

Onward ever press we hasting to perform an office lacking  
 Honour, worship—yea, unlawful for the Gods Olympian—tracking  
 Paths of despair

Down through sunless darkness sloping: stumbling blindly, blindly groping  
 Sinners unbereft of sight, sinners death-bereft of light

Wander there.

(Ant. 4)

Who of mortals doth not shiver all his pulses through, and feareth  
 For the terror of my coming, when the awful law he heareth,  
 Mine ordinance?—mine

By decrees of Fate for ever sealed and ratified, and given  
 Into these, the Hands of Dooming working out the will of Heaven,  
 The law divine?—

Such my right from times eternal: none may scorn me, though infernal  
 Darkness brood above the place assigned to me, where never rays  
 Of sun may shine.

ATHENA descends.

ATHENA. From far, beside Skamander, thine appeal  
 I heard, where I took seisin of the land,

Even that which the Achaian chiefs and kings  
Assigned for ever, root and fruit, to me,  
My goodly portion of the spoils of war,  
A gift for Theseus' scions set apart.

Thence came I, onward speeding tireless feet:  
The winds, my viewless car-steeds, flew so fast  
That in their wingless flight mine ægis hissed.  
Seeing this concourse, wholly strange to earth,  
I fear not, yet amazement fills mine eyes.

Who, who be ye?—to all your rout I speak,  
And to this stranger by mine image crouched.  
Speak, ye who are like to none of all earth's seed,  
Who are not of Goddesses whom Gods behold,  
Who bear no semblance unto human shape—  
Yet it beseems not that bystanders mock

A shape deform: justice draws back therefrom.

CHORUS. Daughter of Zeus, thou shalt in brief learn all.  
Children are we of everlasting Night.

The Curses are we named in the Underworld.

ATHENA. Thy lineage now I know, thy name and fame.

CHORUS. Yea, straight shalt thou learn my prerogatives.

ATHENA. Fain would I, if they may be plainly told.

CHORUS. Slayers of men we chase forth from their homes.

ATHENA. What bourne hath the manslayer's banishment?

CHORUS. Where happiness hath nowhere any place.

ATHENA. Such exile dost thou hiss against yon man?

CHORUS. Yea, for he took on him to slay his mother.

ATHENA. Fear-spurred by no strong Power, no wrath of Heaven?

CHORUS. What goad so keen as spur to matricide?

ATHENA. Before the court are two pleas—one is heard.

CHORUS. Nay, he would neither take nor tender oath.

ATHENA. More than her deeds thou lovest Justice' name.

CHORUS. How?—teach me: wisdom hast thou and to spare.

ATHENA. I say, no oaths can make the wrong prevail.

CHORUS. Make inquisition then; judge righteous judgment.

ATHENA. Commit ye this decision unto me?

CHORUS. Yea surely, worthy child of worthy sire.

ATHENA. Stranger, in thy turn what wilt say hereto?

Thy land, thy lineage, thine afflictions tell

First; then repel thou thine accusers' charge,

If thou in justice trusting hast sat down

Clasping mine image, hard beside mine hearth,

A sacred suppliant, as Ixion sat.

Answer all this, and be thine answer clear.

ORESTES. Athena, Queen, the dark misgiving first

That lurks in thy last words, I do away.

I am not guilt-stained: no pollution comes  
 From mine hand, by thine image as I crouch.  
 And I will give thee perfect proof of this:—  
 Sealed are the tainted murderer's lips by law,  
 Till by the blood-atoning minister  
 A suckling beast's blood have besprent his hands.  
 Long since in other fanes thus purified  
 Was I, by victims and by running streams.  
 So I pronounce this fear clean put away.  
 Now of my lineage straightway shalt thou hear.  
 An Argive am I: well thou know'st my sire,  
 Agamemnon, marshaller of sea-borne men,  
 With whom thou madest Ilium's city Troy  
 No city. He at his home-coming died  
 Shamefully. Yea, my mother, the black-souled,  
 Slew him: she shrouded him in subtle toils  
 Which witness still that murder of the bath.  
 When I, an exile theretofore, came home,  
 I slew my mother, I deny it not,  
 In vengeance for mine own dear father's blood.  
 What guilt is in this deed doth Loxias share,  
 Who threatened pangs, to sting mine heart as goads,  
 If on the guilty I wreaked no revenge.  
 Thou judge my deed; pronounce it right or wrong;  
 Howe'er thou deal with me, I murmur not.  
 ATHENA. The matter is so great, no mortal man  
 Dare judge it. I, even I, am disallowed  
 From giving doom on vengeance-waking murder;  
 The more, since thou hast been assoiled, and yet,  
 Though shriven and clean, cam'st suppliant to my fane.  
 Howbeit, as purged, I bid thee enter Athens.  
 Yet these—their dues not lightly are set aside;  
 And, if their cause be not victorious,  
 The venom of their malice shall thereafter  
 Fall on the land in plagues intolerable.  
 Thus stands it—whether they depart or stay  
 Alike is grievous: I am in a strait.  
 But, seeing this bolt from out the blue falls here,  
 Sworn judges will I choose of murder, so  
 An ordinance for ever will ordain.  
 Ye, summon your sworn witnesses, and show  
 Proofs, by the which shall justice be maintained.  
 The best of all my burghers will I choose,  
 And come, that these may truly try this cause,  
 Oath-bound to utter no unrighteous verdict. [*Exeunt* ATHENA and ORESTES.  
 CHORUS. Now shall be overthrown the old-time laws, (Str. 1.)



New statutes shall bear sway,  
 If yonder mother-murderer's cause, the cause  
 Of wrong, prevail this day.  
 Lo, this day's work shall arm full many an one  
 With reckless lust of crime;  
 For many a parent murdered by a son  
 Doth veriest agony wait—nor now alone,  
 But through all tides of time.

(Ant. 1)

The Frenzied Furies, who mankind behold,  
 No more shall curse this sin,  
 But slip the leash of murders manifold  
 Of kin by hands of kin.  
 Man shall ask man, the while he tells the tale  
 Of wrongs to near kin wrought,  
 'How shall these plagues end—cease awhile to assail?'  
 Ah wretch! his comfort shall no whit avail,  
 His cure shall profit nought.

(Str. 2)

Ha! then let none appeal when his days darken,  
 When murder's dagger smites,  
 Crying to heaven his prayer—'Hear, Justice!—hearken,  
 Thrones of the Avenging Sprites!'—  
 Thus may a father from death's anguish calling  
 Shriek, or a mother slain—  
 Too late! This day is Justice' temple falling:  
 Tears build it not again.

(Ant. 2)

'Tis good that Fear yet lingering midst the nations  
 Somewhere should watch man's soul  
 Throned in the conscience, good that tribulations  
 Should teach men self-control.  
 Who, if he nurture not a spirit humble,  
 When all his path is bright,  
 Who—be it state or man—can choose but stumble  
 From reverence for Right?

(Str. 3)

Envy not thou the freedom that defieth  
 Control, nor that slave-life which cowering lieth  
 A tyrant lord's footstool:  
 'God to life's middle walk the palm hath given  
 Aye'—though elsewhere the governance of Heaven  
 Seem ordered by no rule—  
 Ay, and my strain this chord with that inweaveth:  
 'Verily godlessness, when it conceiveth,  
 Brings arrogance to birth';



But child of wholesome soberness of spirit  
 Fair fortune is, which all men pray to inherit,  
 Dear to all sons of earth.

(Ant. 3)

This of my teaching is the sum—O hear it!—  
 Justice's altar, see that thou revere it:  
 Dare not spurn this aside  
 With godless heel, what time thy passions blind thee  
 To all save gain: vengeance is close behind thee;  
 Fixed doth the end abide.  
 Then, whosoe'er thou art, with reverence lowly  
 Honour thy father and thy mother: holy  
 Be in thy sight the claim  
 Of him who cometh to thy portals faring  
 Thy guest; with hospitality unsparing  
 Do thou receive the same.

(Str. 4)

He who of his free will  
 Doth righteousness, shall still  
 Be blest: no surge of ill  
 Shall overwhelm him under:  
 But he who overleaps  
 Justice, whose dragnet sweeps  
 In heaps confused on heaps  
 Unhallowed plunder,  
 He shall perforce at last  
 Lower his sail, when mast  
 And yard by trouble's blast  
 Are riven asunder.

(Ant. 4)

He, shrieking forth his prayer  
 To heavens that hear not, there  
 Mid whirlpits of despair  
 Hellward descendeth.  
 God laughs at him, to see  
 His helpless agony—  
 Fool, who made boast, 'O'er me  
 No doom impendeth!'  
 Hurl'd toward yon ness his keel  
 O'er Justice' reef doth reel—  
 Lost, lost, unwept, his weal  
 For ever endeth!

*The scene changes to the Areopagus at Athens. Enter ATHENA, with twelve Athenian burghers. Then enter ORESTES, followed by the CHORUS.*

ATHENA. Herald, lift up thy voice; hush thou the throng;  
 And let the shattering Tuscan trumpet's throat,

Filled with the straining breath of mortal lips,  
 Peal forth its cry far-soaring o'er the host.  
 While filling are these judgment-seats, it fits  
 That men be hushed, that all the city hear  
 Mine ordinance eternal, that this man  
 May hear withal, and justice' doom be given. [Trumpet. Enter APOLLO.  
 CHORUS. Apollo, King, thou lord it o'er thine own!  
 Say thou, what hast thou with this cause to do?  
 APOLLO. I come to bear my witness: this man is  
 Guest of my temple, suppliant of my shrine.  
 And I am he that cleansed this murder-stain,  
 And I am he shall justify him. Mine  
 The guilt is of this mother's murder. Thou  
 Open this cause, and, as thou find'st, decide.  
 ATHENA (to CHORUS). First word to you: I open so this cause;  
 For right it is that first the accuser speak,  
 From the beginning setting forth the matter.  
 CHORUS. Many we are, yet shall our words be few.  
 Thou, answering, by each question set reply.  
 Thy mother—tell us first, didst thou slay her?  
 ORESTES. I slew: not on denial rests my plea.  
 CHORUS. Lo, of the three falls one already ours!  
 ORESTES. Thou vauntest over one not thrown as yet.  
 CHORUS. Nay, thou must tell how thou didst murder her.  
 ORESTES. I tell: mine hand drew sword and gashed her throat.  
 CHORUS. So?—moved of whom, and by whose counselling?  
 ORESTES. By this God's oracles. He my witness is.  
 CHORUS. He, the God-prophet, bade thee slay thy mother!  
 ORESTES. He: nor thus far I murmur at my fate.  
 CHORUS. Doomed by the votes, thou soon shalt change thy tone!  
 ORESTES. I trust yet. My sire helps me from his tomb.  
 CHORUS. O yea, trust in the dead, thou mother-slayer!  
 ORESTES. Yea, for a twofold crime polluted her.  
 CHORUS. Yea?—how? Instruct these judges touching this.  
 ORESTES. She slew her husband, and she slew my sire.  
 CHORUS. Death, then, her debt hath cancelled, not thine—yet.  
 ORESTES. Why did ye hunt not *her*, while yet she lived?  
 CHORUS. She was not blood-kin to the man she slew.  
 ORESTES. And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?  
 CHORUS. Bare she not thee, red murderer, 'neath her zone?  
 Dar'st thou disown thy mother's most dear blood?  
 ORESTES. Now bear thou witness. Set thou forth for me,  
 Apollo, if I slew her rightfully.  
 For I disown the deed not, as it stands.  
 If rightly shed or wrongly seems this blood  
 To thy mind, judge, that I may tell it these.

APOLLO. To you, Athena's great court, will I speak  
 Righteously. I, the Prophet, will not lie.  
 Never I spake on my prophetic throne  
 Concerning man, nor woman, neither state,  
 Aught save what Zeus the Olympians' Father bade.  
 Heed ye the might of this, the Fount of Justice,  
 And bow before the purpose of my Sire;  
 No oath prevails to override Zeus' word.

CHORUS. Zeus, as thou sayest, gave this oracle  
 That bade Orestes for his sire's blood take  
 Vengeance, and count as nought his mother's right!

APOLLO. Is *her* death like a highborn hero's death,  
 One honoured with the sceptre Zeus bestowed?—  
 And he by a woman slain—not with fierce shafts  
 That smite from far, as of some Amazon;  
 But as thou, Pallas, shalt be told, and ye  
 That sit to give your judgment-vote hereon.  
 Home from the war, from earning meed of glory  
 Beyond all other, she with loyal words  
 Welcomed him: as he bathed, she cast o'er him  
 Tent-like a robe that overdressed all; smote  
 Her lord so trammelled in the gapless shroud.  
 This doom, as hath been told, that hero found,  
 The worship-worthy lord of sea-borne hosts.  
 So paint I her, that indignation-stung  
 May be all folk ordained to judge this cause.

CHORUS. Zeus, by thy tale, most heeds the father's fate:  
 Yet himself fettered Kronos, his grey sire!  
 How dar'st thou say this clashes not with that?  
 Judges, I call you to record—give ear!

APOLLO. O monsters all-aborred, things loathed of Gods!  
 Fetters might one loose: this wrong may be healed;  
 Yea, many a device to 'scape there is.  
 But when the dust hath drunk the blood of man,  
 Once dead, no resurrection is there then.

For this my sire hath wrought no healing-spell,  
 Though all things else he can reverse and change  
 At will, in no wise panting in his strength.

CHORUS. Nay, mark whereunto tends thy plea for him:  
 Who poured his mother's blood—his own—to earth,  
 Shall *he* in Argos in his sire's halls dwell  
 Thereafter?—at what public altars pray?

What clansmen's lustral laver shall receive him?

APOLLO. This answer I—my pleading's justice mark!  
 The mother of the child named hers is not  
 The parent, but the new-sown issue's nurse.

The sire is parent; she but harboureth,  
 A stranger-guest, such life as God blasts not.  
 Lo, of mine argument I give you proof:—  
 There may be father without mother. There,  
 Child of Olympian Zeus, the witness stands;  
 Not fostered she in darkness of the womb,  
 Yet scion such as Goddess never bare.  
 Pallas, in all else to mine utmost power  
 Will I make great thy city and thy folk;  
 And this man to thy temple-hearth I sent  
 That he might be your leal friend evermore,  
 That thou mightst win him, Goddess, your ally,  
 Him and his children, and that by the seed  
 Of these this covenant may be cherished aye.  
 ATHENA (*to CHORUS*). Shall I bid these men from their conscience now  
 Judge righteous judgment?—Hath enough been said?  
 CHORUS. Yea, for our every shaft by this is shot.  
 I wait to hear how shall the cause be judged.  
 ATHENA (*to APOLLO and ORESTES*). How then? are ye content that so I rule?  
 APOLLO. Ye have heard whom ye have heard: now in your hearts  
 Respect your oath the while ye give the vote.  
 ATHENA. Now hearken to the statute, Attic folk  
 Who judge this first of trials for shed blood.  
 Yea, and henceforth for Aigeus' people stands  
 This council-place of judges evermore;  
 Here on the War-God's Hill, the Amazons' camp  
 Where stood their tents, when came their host for hate  
 Of Theseus, and against yon town uppled,  
 New-reared with stately towers, their rival burg,  
 And sacrificed to Ares, whence the rock  
 Is named the War-God's Hill:—here Reverence  
 With Fear her sister, homed in burghers' hearts  
 By day and night, shall all wrong-doing curb,  
 While my folk take them not new laws for old:  
 But if with tainted inflow and with mire  
 Thou foul clear water, thou canst drink not thence.  
 I warn my burghers—neither anarchy  
 Nor tyranny embrace ye nor revere,  
 Nor yet cast ye all fear beyond your walls:  
 For what man can be just who feareth nought?  
 In righteous awe of this court's majesty  
 Such bulwark of your land and of your town,  
 Such safeguard, shall ye find, as no folk hath  
 From norland Scythia south to Pelops' realm.  
 This judgment-court do I thus found, by bribes  
 Untainted, awful, unto vengeance swift,

A warder watching o'er a sleeping land.

This exhortation have I lengthened out

Unto my burghers for all time. Now rise,

Take each his pebble, and determine right

In reverence for your oath. My say is said.

CHORUS. Lo now, I warn you in no wise to slight

Us, heavy-handed visitants of your land.

APOLLO. And I command you, fear mine oracles,

That are of Zeus too: fruitless make them not.

CHORUS. Thou dost usurp this cognisance of blood!

No more shall be thine oracles undefiled.

APOLLO. How?—erred Allfather in his counsels, when

Ixion the first murderer suppliant came?

CHORUS. Ay, talk! If justice be denied to me,

I for its ruin haunt henceforth this land.

APOLLO. Tush! amid new and olden Gods alike

Thou art unhonoured. Victory shall be mine.

CHORUS. In Pheres' halls so didst thou—didst persuade

The Fates to grant men immortality.

APOLLO. Was it not right to bless who revered me,

In that hour most when sorest was his need?

CHORUS. The old order thou destroyedst, and with wine

Didst thou beguile the Ancient Goddesses.

APOLLO. Soon shalt thou, by the judgment's issue foiled,

Spue forth thy venom, yet harm not thy foes.

CHORUS. Since thou, the young, o'erridest me the old,

Only to hear the sentence given I wait,

Yet doubtful whether to be wroth with Athens.

ATHENA. With me it rests to give my sentence last.

I to Orestes' cause shall add this vote:

For mother is there none that gave me birth:

I am wholly—save for marriage—with the male

With all my soul; I take the father's side.

Of so much less account I hold the death

Of her who slew her lord, the household's head.

If equal be the votes, Orestes wins.

Cast forth the lots with all speed from the urns

Ye judges unto whom this office falls.

ORESTES. Phœbus Apollo, how shall this strife end?

CHORUS. O Night, dark mother, seest thou these things?

ORESTES. Now strangling waits for me, or light of life!

CHORUS. Ruin for us, or dignities increased!

APOLLO. Mine hosts, the votes cast forth count ye aright:

Justice in your decision reverence ye.

If one vote lack, comes great calamity,

And one vote rightly cast redeems a house.



ATHENA. Acquitted is this man for blood arraigned;  
 For equal is the tale of either votes.  
 ORESTES. O Pallas, O thou saviour of mine house,  
 I was bereft of fatherland, and thou  
 Restoredst me! Now many a Greek shall say:  
 'Argive once more, the man mid wealth ancestral  
 May dwell, by grace of Pallas, Loxias,  
 And of that third, the Saviour-lord, who rules  
 All things,' who for my sire's fate had respect,  
 Who, seeing these, the Avengers, saves me now.  
 And I unto this land and to thy folk  
 Make oath, as homeward now I turn to go,  
 That henceforth, through the fulness of all time,  
 Hitherward never chieftain of my land  
 Marching shall raise the battle-marshalled spear;  
 For I myself then lying in my tomb,  
 Will make their march, if they transgress this oath,  
 By irresistible calamities  
 Dark with despair, their voyaging accurst,  
 So that they shall repent them of their toil.  
 If mine oath rest inviolate, I will be  
 All-gracious to them while they honour aye  
 This burg of Pallas with confederate spear.  
 Farewell: mayst thou and these that ward thy walls,  
 Grappling with foes, find none to 'scape your might,  
 Your conquering spear whereon deliverance rides.

[Exit with APOLLO.  
 (Str. 1)]

CHORUS. Upstart Gods, ye have downriden  
 Olden laws, have left mine hand  
 Void! Oh misery!—I am bidden  
 Yield mine honours! This your land  
 Under my wrath lies banned:  
 I avenge my grief by casting  
 Venom-spray thereon, the spume  
 Frothing from mine heart, and blasting  
 Tree disleafed and barren womb.  
 The crushed land's canker-doom—  
 Ho for Justice!—lo, is raining  
 Ruin-drops on grass and corn!  
 What should I do else?—tamely plaining  
 Bear mocks?—not visit their disdain  
 On this people? Ah forlorn  
 Daughters whom Night hath borne,  
 Now things of scorn!

ATHENA. Give heed to me: groan not so heavily.  
 Ye are not vanquished. Nay, by equal votes



Fairly was sentence passed. Ye are not slighted.  
 Nay, but from Zeus clear testimony came—  
 And who revealed it, also testified—  
 'Of this deed let Orestes take no hurt.'  
 Therefore let not your anger's lightning smite  
 This land, nor nurse ye wrath, nor blast the fruits  
 Thereof by down-dropt gout of demon-spite—  
 Relentless darts devouring seeds of life.  
 For here in utter faith I promise you  
 Shrines, sanctuary-crypts in a just land—  
 Where by your hearths shall ye sit splendour-throned,—  
 To have and hold, aye honoured by my folk.

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(*Ant.* 1)

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What should I do else?—tamely plaining

Bear mocks?—not visit their disdain

On this people? Ah forlorn

Daughters whom Night hath borne,

Now things of scorn!

ATHENA. Ye are not dishonoured. Do not in fell wrath,

Goddesses, smite past healing mortals' land.

I too in Zeus trust,—yet why speak hereof?—

And know, alone of Gods, the keys that ward

The chamber where his thunderbolts are sealed:—

Nay, but such arms I need not! Swayed by me,

Cast not the fruitage of a froward tongue

Earthward, to blast all increase of the land.

Lull thou this storm-black billow's bitter rage

As one with me that dwells, with awe revered.

When thine the firstfruits are of sacrifice

For babes and wedlock-rites through this wide land

For ever, this my counsel shall ye praise.

(*Str.* 2)

CHORUS. O that I thus should be dealt with!—'neath earth to be banished,  
 be banished!

I, with the wisdom of old who am dowered, shall I dwell with you, I,

Held a pollution, an outcast whose honour hath vanished, hath vanished?

Nay, but I breathe out all fury, all wrath—Earth, hearken my cry!

Ah for the thrill of the pang through mine heart that is stinging, is stinging!

Bow down thine ear to the cry of mine anger, my mother, O Night!

Cunning resistless of Gods from my grasp hath been wringing—yea, wringing

As from a thing of nought—mine immemorial right!

ATHENA. Still with thy wrath I bear—the elder thou,

And wiser far than I in manifold lore:

Yet prudent wit to me too Zeus hath given.

Now if to an alien land ye hence depart,

For my land shall ye pine; this I foretell.

The forward-flowing tide of time shall be

Richer in blessing to my folk; and thou,

Enthroned in honour mid Erechtheus' homes,

Shalt win such homage from his sons and daughters

As never shalt thou have of other men.

Such blessings from mine hand thou mayest choose,

Doing, receiving good, with honour high

My partner in this god-beloved land.

(*Ant.* 2)

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be banished!

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Held a pollution, an outcast whose honour hath vanished, hath vanished?

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Cunning resistless of Gods from my grasp hath been wringing—yea, wringing

As from a thing of nought—mine immemorial right!

ATHENA. I will not weary of fair speech to thee.

Ne'er shalt thou say that thou, the elder god,

By me, the younger, and by Athens' folk

Wast driven dishonoured forth to banishment.

If holy thou account the majesty

Of Suasion, and the peace-spell of my tongue,

O then remain. If thou wilt not remain,

Wrongfully shalt thou hurl against my town

Wrath, rancorous spite, or scathe unto her sons.

Lo, thine it is to hold this land in fee

By lawful right in honour evermore.

CHORUS. Athena, Queen, thou tell'st me of a home?—

ATHENA. Unvexed of all annoy. Accept thou this.

CHORUS. Grant I accept—what honour waiteth me?

ATHENA. That no house shall without thy blessing thrive.

CHORUS. Wilt thou make sure that I shall have such power?

ATHENA. Yea, I will prosper such as reverence thee.

CHORUS. Wilt thou for all time plight thy troth hereto?

ATHENA. What I will not fulfil I need not say.

CHORUS. Meseems thy words bring balm—mine anger dies.

ATHENA. Dwell in the land, and thou shalt get thee friends.

CHORUS. What hymn wouldst thou that I chant o'er the land?

ATHENA. A hymn that hails a glorious victory's dawn,

A hymn of boons from earth, from ocean's dew,

From heaven, invoking breathings of the winds

To waft the sun-gold as they pace the land;

A hymn of earth's increase, of flocks and herds

Abounding, failing never with the years,

A hymn of babes in kindly travail born.

But be thou strict to root the impious out,

Our weeds—for as a gardener cherish I

And shield from sorrow's blight the righteous race.

[Hurl thou not o'er my land the seeds of strife,

Whetstones of blood, whereof brave hearts are pierced

Frenzied with passion kindled not with wine.

Nor, plucking forth the fierce cock's fiery heart,

In my folk plant it, kindling civic broil

Of brothers against brothers ranged defiant.

Be their wars all with aliens—wars enow

For hearts wherein stern lust of glory burns!—

But of the home-bird's bickerings will I none.]

Such boons be thine: but in the glorious strife

Of war, myself will suffer not this town

To be uncrowned with victory midst the nations.

CHORUS. I accept: for mine home no more I refuse

(*Str. 1*)

Queen Pallas's dwelling.

I will wrong not the city which most high Zeus

And the War-god, excelling

In strength, have accounted their fortress-town;

For she, to deliver

Gods' altars from spoilers shall battle, their crown

Of rejoicing for ever.

I call down blessing on her in this hour,

In love foretelling

How the sun with his quickening splendour shall shower

Wealth on her, life's fullest bliss for her dower

As a fountain upwelling.

ATHENA. All this hath my love's zeal done

For my people: a home have I given

In their midst to the Mighty Ones hard to be won,

Yea, to them from whose lordship exempted is none

Of mortals under the heaven.

Who hath felt not their power knoweth not

Whence calamity comes in his lot.  
 Him sins long past in their chains bind fast,  
 And hale him their bar before;  
 And by silent Death is his clamorous breath  
 Stilled evermore.

CHORUS. O the boons that I chant, they are mine to bestow! (Ant. 1)

No blight breathe, flinging  
 Death-dews on the trees, nor the sun's fierce glow  
 Shrive! buds at their springing  
 Or ever they break from the cradle-sheath  
 Of their wintertide-sleeping.

No rust touch the corn with its cancerous teeth  
 Like a serpent on-creeping.

By the bounty of Pan twin lambs let the ewe  
 Ever bear, as on-winging

The hours lead hither the year born anew:  
 So thy land of its treasure-trove yearly their due  
 To the Gods shall be bringing.

ATHENA. Ho, warders of my wall,  
 Hear ye their blessings?—all  
 These surely shall befall;  
 For all-prevailing

The mighty Erinny's is  
 With Gods aye throned in bliss,  
 With Dwellers in the Abyss.

Clear-seen, unfailing,  
 Man's cup of doom they brim;  
 And some lives one glad hymn  
 Make they, some misty-dim  
 With tears of wailing.

CHORUS. And I ban the arrow that darkling flieth, (Str. 2)  
 Whereby man dieth  
 Before his hour.

Unto sweet maids ope ye the new life's portals  
 Of love, Immortals  
 Who hold this power.

O Fates, our sisters, O strict dividers  
 Of doom, abiders  
 In every home

With hands aye heavy in just visitations,  
 By all earth's nations  
 Most revered, come!

ATHENA. Glad am I for my land  
 Thus dowered with gracious hand.  
 I bless the soft eyes' pleading

Of Suasion: when, not heeding  
 Mine own lips' interceding,  
 These raged, she spake through me.  
 'Twas Zeus the Counsel-lord  
 Gained us that great award.

Henceforth in rivalry  
 Of good deeds we contending  
 Shall both, through years unending  
 Win victory.

CHORUS. And faction, hungry for mischief ever,  
 In your streets never  
 Resound her yell;  
 Nor may burghers' blood from the red dust crying,  
 With murders replying  
 To murders, swell  
 The tale of curses; but love delighting  
 In love-requiting  
 Be theirs: one will  
 In cherishing friends, against foemen steeling  
 Their hearts—here is healing  
 For many an ill.

(Ant. 2)

ATHENA. Lo, wisdom in the hearts of these;  
 Their tongues the law of kindness learn.  
 Great gain from these dread Presences  
 For this my people I discern.  
 These love you now; O love them ye;  
 Honour ye them exceedingly:

So all your lives shall be with glory crowned—  
 A land, a state, for righteousness renowned.

CHORUS. Blessèd be ye in your goodly heritage, burgher-nation! (Str. 3)  
 Blessèd be ye, who are homed so nigh unto Zeus, who are dear  
 To the Maiden beloved, with her wisdom are dowered, to whose habitation  
 'Neath the wings of Pallas, the bolts of Allfather come not near.

ATHENA. Blessèd be ye withal!  
 Now must I pass before, to lead you  
 On to your shrine-crypt's hall.  
 Lo where the sacred lamps precede you  
 High-borne by your attendant-train.  
 By blood of hallowed victims slain  
 On-ushered pass ye underground.  
 Thence send ye influences benign,  
 That victory's star on these may shine:  
 Each influence to my land malign  
 Be there fast bound.  
 Lead, warders of my city-home,

Ye sons of Kranaus, these who come

To sojourn with you. In my folk

Aye may their gracious acts provoke

Love: be your hearts their shrine!

CHORUS. Blessèd be ye, twice-blessèd, all ye in the city abiding, (Ant. 3)

O ye Immortals and mortals, who dwell within Pallas's wall!

While ye shall revere me, your fellow-abider, no cause for chiding

Of the lot of your life shall ye find, what chance soever befall.

ATHENA. All praise to these your invocation-vows!

With light of splendour-bearing brands will I

Escort you to your deep haunts 'neath the earth,

I and mine handmaids, who with reverence ward

My sacred image. Of all Theseus' land

Now shall the flower go forth, a glorious troop

Of boys, of women, and of matrons old.

With crimson vesture's bravery honour ye

These. Let the leaping flames set forward now,

That these, our land's great visitants, may show

Their grace henceforth in fair prosperity.

*The procession of women and children, headed by ATHENA and the EUMENIDES, moves forward.*

CHANT OF THE ESCORT-PROCESSION.

(Str. 1)

Pass to your homes, O Mighty Ones, of honour jealous ever,

Sprung from Night's womb, lone Powers, of whom shall spring like issue  
never;

Led on by this adoring train—

*O dwellers in the land, refrain from speech: this hush is holy!—*

(Ant. 1)

Pass to the immemorial caves, hid under earth dark-veiling:

There upon you with honours due, with sacrifice unfailing,

Shall we in deepest reverence call.

*Break silence not, ye people all; from speech refrain you wholly!*

*The procession reaches the entrance to the Cave of the FURIES, which is beneath the Areopagus.*

(Str. 2)

Come hither, Queens of Worship, come, henceforth on Athens turning

A kindly face, with heart of grace to usward steadfast-yearning.

Lo here your path; pace down the same

Glad, lit by brand-devouring flame.

*Raise, all ye people, now the acclaim of holy song far-ringing!*

(Ant. 2)

Within yon halls, by gleaming torches lit, the peace-oblation



Shall aye be poured. The all-seeing lord, even Zeus, for Pallas' nation  
    To bring the new fair age to birth,  
    With Fate allied, hath stooped to earth!  
*Ring out, all folk, the voice of mirth, the strain of holy singing!*

*The procession of women and children passes on down the streets of the city.*

# ANTIGONE

## PERSONS REPRESENTED

ANTIGONE, } daughters of *Œdipus*, late king of *Thebes*.  
ISMENE, }

CREON, brother to *Jocasta*, late queen of *Thebes*, Captain-general of the army, and successor to the throne.

*A Sentinel.*

HÆMON, son to *Creon*, betrothed to *Antigone*.

TIRESIAS, a seer.

*A Messenger in attendance on Creon.*

EURYDICE, wife to *Creon*.

*The CHORUS is composed of Senators of Thebes.*

*Guards; Attendants; a Boy leading Tiresias.*

*Scene, before the Royal Palace at Thebes. Time, early morning. Enter*

*ANTIGONE and ISMENE.*

ANTIGONE. *Ismene*, dear in very sisterhood,  
Do you perceive how Heaven upon us two  
Means to fulfil, before we come to die,  
Out of all ills that grow from *Œdipus*—  
What not, indeed? for there's no sorrow or harm,  
No circumstance of scandal or of shame  
I have not seen, among your griefs, and mine.  
And now again, what is this word they say  
Our Captain-general proclaimed but now  
To the whole city? Did you hear and heed?  
Or are you blind, while pains of enemies  
Are passing on your friends?

ISMENE. *Antigone*,  
To me no tidings about friends are come,  
Pleasant or grievous, ever since we two  
Of our two brothers were bereft, who died  
Both in one day, each by the other's hand.  
And since the *Argive* host in this same night  
Took itself hence, I have heard nothing else,  
To make me happier, or more miserable.

ANTIGONE. I knew as much; and for that reason made you  
Go out of doors—to tell you privately.

ISMENE. What is it? I see you have some mystery.

ANTIGONE. What! has not *Creon* to the tomb preferred

One of our brothers, and with contumely  
 Withheld it from the other? Eteocles  
 Duly, they say, even as by law was due,  
 He hid beneath the earth, rendering him honour  
 Among the dead below; but the dead body  
 Of Polynices, miserably slain,  
 They say it has been given out publicly  
 None may bewail, none bury, all must leave  
 Unwept, unsepulchred, a dainty prize  
 For fowl that watch, gloating upon their prey!  
 This is the matter he has had proclaimed—  
 Excellent Creon! for your heed, they say,  
 And mine, I tell you—mine! and he moves hither,  
 Meaning to announce it plainly in the ears  
 Of such as do not know it, and to declare  
 It is no matter of small moment; he  
 Who does any of these things shall surely die;  
 The citizens shall stone him in the streets.  
 So stands the case. Now you will quickly show  
 If you are worthy of your birth or no.  
 ISMENE. But O rash heart, what good, if it be thus,  
 Could I effect, helping or hindering?  
 ANTIGONE. Look, will you join me? will you work with me?  
 ISMENE. In what attempt? What mean you?  
 ANTIGONE. Help me lift  
 The body up—  
 ISMENE. What, would you bury him?  
 Against the proclamation?  
 ANTIGONE. My own brother  
 And yours I will! If you will not, I will;  
 I shall not prove disloyal.  
 ISMENE. You are mad!  
 When Creon has forbidden it?  
 ANTIGONE. From mine own  
 He has no right to stay me.  
 ISMENE. Alas, O sister,  
 Think how our father perished! self-convict—  
 Abhorred—dishonoured—blind—his eyes put out  
 By his own hand! How she who was at once  
 His wife and mother with a knotted noose  
 Laid violent hands on her own life! And how  
 Our two unhappy brothers in one day  
 Each on his own head by the other's hand  
 Wrought common ruin! We now left alone—  
 Do but consider how most miserably  
 We too shall perish, if despite of law

We traverse the behest or power of kings.  
 We must remember we are women born,  
 Unapt to cope with men; and, being ruled  
 By mightier than ourselves, we have to hear  
 These things—and worse. For my part, I will ask  
 Pardon of those beneath, for what perforce  
 I needs must do, but yield obedience  
 To them that walk in power; to exceed  
 Is madness, and not wisdom.

ANTIGONE.                                Then in future  
 I will not bid you help me; nor henceforth,  
 Though you desire, shall you, with my good will,  
 Share what I do. Be what seems right to you;  
 Him will I bury. Death, so met, were honour;  
 And for that capital crime of piety,  
 Loving and loved, I will lie by his side.  
 Far longer is there need I satisfy  
 Those nether Powers, than powers on earth; for there  
 For ever must I lie. You, if you will,  
 Hold up to scorn what is approved of Heaven!

ISMENE. I am not one to cover things with scorn;  
 But I was born too feeble to contend  
 Against the state.

ANTIGONE.                                Yes, you can put that forward;  
 But I will go and heap a burial mound  
 Over my most dear brother.

ISMENE.                                        My poor sister,  
 How beyond measure do I fear for you!

ANTIGONE. Do not spend fear on me. Shape your own course.

ISMENE. At least announce it, then, to nobody  
 But keep it close, as I will.

ANTIGONE.                                Tell it, tell it!  
 You'll cross me worse, by far, if you keep silence—  
 Not publish it to all.

ISMENE.                                        Your heart beats hotly  
 For chilling work!

ANTIGONE.                                I know that those approve  
 Whom I most need to please.

ISMENE.                                        If you could do it!  
 But you desire impossibilities.

ANTIGONE. Well, when I find I have no power to stir,  
 I will cease trying.

ISMENE.                                        But things impossible  
 'Tis wrong to attempt at all.

ANTIGONE.                                If you will say it,  
 I shall detest you soon; and you will justly

Incur the dead man's hatred. Suffer me  
 And my unwisdom to endure the weight  
 Of what is threatened. I shall meet with nothing  
 More grievous, at the worst, than death, with honour.  
 ISMENE. Then go, if you will have it: and take this with you,  
 You go on a fool's errand!

[Exit ANTIGONE.]

Lover true  
 To your beloved, none the less, are you!

[Exit.]

Enter THEBAN SENATORS, as Chorus.

I. 1.

CHORUS. Sunbeam bright! Thou fairest ray  
 That ever dawned on Theban eyes  
 Over the portals seven!  
 O orb of aureate day,  
 How glorious didst thou rise  
 O'er Dirca's streams, shining from heaven,  
 Him, the man with shield of white  
 Who came from Argos in armour dight  
 Hurrying runagate o'er the plain,  
 Jerking harder his bridle rein;  
 Who by Polynices' quarrellous broil  
 Stirred up in arms to invade our soil  
 With strident cries as an eagle flies  
 Swooped down on the fields before him,  
 'Neath cover of eagle pinion white  
 As drifted snow, a buckler bright  
 On many a breast, and a horsetail crest  
 From each helm floating o'er him.

I. 2.

Yawning with many a blood-stained spear  
 Around our seven-gated town  
 High o'er the roofs he stood;  
 Then, or ever a torch could sear  
 With flames the rampart-crown—  
 Or ever his jaws were filled with blood  
 Of us and ours, lo, he was fled!  
 Such clatter of war behind him spread,  
 Stress too sore for his utmost might  
 Matched with the Dragon in the fight;  
 For Zeus abhors tongue-glorious boasts;  
 And straightway as he beheld their hosts,  
 Where on they rolled, covered with gold,  
 Streaming in mighty eddy,

Scornfully with a missile flame  
He struck down Capaneus, as he came  
Uplifting high his victory-cry  
At the topmost goal already.

## II. 1.

Tantalus-like aloft he hung, then fell;  
Earth at his fall resounded;  
Even as, maddened by the Bacchic spell,  
On with torch in hand he bounded,  
Breathing blasts of hate.  
So the stroke was turned aside,  
Mighty Ares rudely dealing  
Others elsewhere, far and wide,  
Like a right-hand courser wheeling  
Round the goals of fate.

For captains seven at portals seven  
Found each his match in the combat even,  
And left on the field both sword and shield  
As a trophy to Zeus, who o'erthrew them;  
Save the wretched twain, who against each other  
Though born of one father, and one mother,  
Laid lances at aim—to their own death came,  
And the common fate that slew them.

## II. 2.

But now loud Victory returns at last  
On Theban chariots smiling,  
Let us begin oblivion of the past,  
Memories of the late war beguiling  
Into slumber sound.  
Seek we every holy shrine;  
There begin the night-long chorus;  
Let the Theban Boy divine,  
Bacchus, lead the way before us,  
Shaking all the ground.

Leave we the song: the King is here;  
Creon, Menœceus' son, draws near;  
To the function strange—like the heaven-sent change  
Which has raised him newly to power:  
What counsel urging—what ends of state,  
That he summons us to deliberate,  
The elders all, by his herald's call,  
At a strange unwonted hour?



*Enter CREON, attended.*

CREON. Sirs, for the ship of state—the Gods once more,  
After much rocking on a stormy surge,  
Set her on even keel. Now therefore you,  
You of all others, by my summoners  
I bade come hither; having found you first  
Right loyal ever to the kingly power  
In Laius' time; and next, while Œdipus  
Ordered the commonwealth; and since his fall,  
With steadfast purposes abiding still,  
Circling their progeny. Now, since they perished,  
Both on one day, slain by a two-edged fate,  
Striking and stricken, sullied with a stain  
Of mutual fratricide, I, as you know,  
In right of kinship nearest to the dead,  
Possess the throne and take the supreme power.  
Howbeit it is impossible to know  
The spirit of any man, purpose or will,  
Before it be displayed by exercise  
In government and laws. To me, I say,  
Now as of old, that pilot of the state  
Who sets no hand to the best policy,  
But remains tongue-tied through some terror, seems  
Vilest of men. Him too, who sets a friend  
Before his native land, I prize at nothing.  
God, who seest all things always, witness it!  
If I perceive, where safety should have been,  
Mischief advancing toward my citizens,  
I will not sit in silence; nor account  
As friend to me the country's enemy;  
But thus I deem: she is our ark of safety;  
And friends are made then only, when, embarked  
Upon her deck, we ride the seas upright.  
Such are the laws by which I mean to further  
This city's welfare; and akin to these  
I have given orders to the citizens  
Touching the sons of Œdipus. Eteocles,  
Who in this city's quarrel fought and fell,  
The foremost of our champions in the fray,  
They should entomb with the full sanctity  
Of rites that solemnize the downward road  
Of their dead greatest. Him the while, his brother,  
That Polynices who, returning home  
A banished man, sought to lay waste with fire  
His household Gods, his native country—sought

To glut himself with his own kindred's blood,  
 Or carry them away to slavery,  
 It has been promulgated to the city  
 No man shall bury, none should wail for him;  
 Unsepulchred, shamed in the eyes of men,  
 His body shall be left to be devoured  
 By dogs and fowls of the air. Such is my will.  
 Never with me shall wicked men usurp  
 The honours of the righteous; but whoe'er  
 Is friendly to this city shall, by me,  
 Living or dead, be honoured equally.

I SENATOR. Creon Menœceus' son, we hear your pleasure  
 Both on this city's friend, and on her foe;  
 It is your sovereignty's prerogative  
 To pass with absolute freedom on the dead,  
 And us, who have survived them.

CREON. Please to see  
 What has been said performed.

I SENATOR. That charge confer  
 On some one who is younger.

CREON. Of the body?  
 Sentries are set, already.

I SENATOR. Then what else  
 Is there, besides, which you would lay on us?

CREON. Not to connive at disobedience.

I SENATOR. There's no such fool as to embrace his death.

CREON. Death is the penalty. But men right often  
 Are brought to ruin, through their dreams of gain.

*Enter a SENTINEL.*

SENTINEL. My lord, I will not say—"breathless with speed  
 I come, plying a nimble foot"; for truly  
 I had a many sticking-points of thought,  
 Wheeling about to march upon my rear.  
 For my heart whispered me all sorts of counsel;  
 "Poor wretch, why go, to meet thy sentence?"—"Wretch,  
 Tarrying again? If Creon hear the news  
 From others' lips, how shalt thou then not rue it?"  
 Out of this whirligig it came to pass  
 I hastened—at my leisure; a short road,  
 Thus, becomes long. Nevertheless at last  
 It won the day to come hither, to your presence;  
 And speak I will, though nothing have to say;  
 For I come clinging to the hope that I  
 Can suffer nothing—save my destiny.

CREON. Well—and what caused you this disheartenment?

SENTINEL. First let me tell you what concerns myself.  
I do protest, I neither did the deed,  
Nor saw it done, whoever 'twas who did it;  
Nor should I rightly come to any harm.

CREON. At all events you are a good tactician,  
And fence the matter off all round. But clearly  
You have some strange thing to tell?

SENTINEL. Yes. Serious tidings  
Induce much hesitation.

CREON. Once for all  
Please to speak out, and make an end, and go.

SENTINEL. Why, I am telling you. That body some one  
Has just now buried—sprinkled thirsty dust  
Over the form—added the proper rites,  
And has gone off.

CREON. What say you? What man dared  
To do it?

SENTINEL. I know not. There was no dint there  
Of any mattock, not a sod was turned;  
Merely hard ground and bare, without a break,  
Without a rut from wheels; it was some workman  
Who left no mark. When the first day-sentry  
Shewed what had happened, we were all dismayed.  
The body had vanished; not indeed interred,  
But a light dust lay on it, as if poured out  
By one who shunned the curse; and there appeared  
No trace that a wild beast, or any hound,  
Had come, or torn the carcase. Angry words  
Were bandied up and down, guard blaming guard,  
And blows had like to end it, none being by  
To hinder; for each one of us in turn  
Stood culprit, none convicted, but the plea  
"I know not" passed. Ready were we to take  
Hot iron in hand, or pass through fire, and call  
The Gods to witness, that we neither did it,  
Nor were accessory to any man  
Who compassed it, or did it. So at last,  
When all our searching proved to be in vain,  
There speaks up one, who made us, every man,  
Hang down our heads for fear, knowing no way  
To say him nay, or without scathe comply,  
His burden was, this business must be carried  
To you, without reserve. That voice prevailed;  
And me, poor wretch, the lot condemns to get  
This piece of luck. I come a post unwilling,  
I well believe it, to unwilling ears;

None love the messenger who brings bad news.

1 SENATOR. My lord, my heart misgave me from the first  
This must be something more than natural.

CREON. Truce to your speech, before I choke with rage,  
Lest you be found at once grey-beard and fool!

To say that guardian deities would care  
For this dead body, is intolerable.

Could they, by way of supereminent honour  
Paid to a benefactor, give him burial,  
Who came to fire their land, their pillared fanes  
And sacred treasures, and set laws at nought?  
Or do you see Gods honouring the bad?

'Tis false. These orders from the first some people

Hardly accepted, murmuring at me,

Shaking their heads in secret, stiffening

Uneasy necks against this yoke of mine.

They have suborned these sentinels to do it,

I know that well. No such ill currency

Ever appeared, as money to mankind:

This is it that sacks cities, this routs out

Men from their homes, and trains and turns astray

The minds of honest mortals, setting them

Upon base actions; this made plain to men

Habits of all misdoing, and cognizance

Of every work of wickedness. Howbeit

Such hireling perpetrators, in the end,

Have wrought so far, that they shall pay for it.

So surely as I live to worship Jove,

Know this for truth; I swear it in your ears;

Except you find and bring before my face

The real actor in this funeral,

Death, by itself, shall not suffice for you,

Before, hung up alive, you have revealed

The secret of this outrage; that henceforth

You may seek plunder—not without respect

Of where your profit lies; and may be taught

It is not good to covet all men's pay;

For mark you! by corruption few men thrive,

And many come to mischief.

SENTINEL. Have I leave

To say a word, or shall I turn and go?

CREON. Cannot you see your prating tortures me?

SENTINEL. Pricks you how deep? In the ears, or to the spleen?

CREON. Why do you gauge my chafing, where it lies?

SENTINEL. Your heart-ache were the doer's, your ear-ache mine.

CREON. Out, what a bare-faced babbler born art thou!

SENTINEL. Never the actor in this business, though!

CREON. Yes, and for money you would sell your soul!

SENTINEL. Plague on it! 'tis hard, a man should be suspicious,  
And with a false suspicion!

CREON.

Yes, suspicion;

Mince it as best you may. Make me to know  
Whose are these doings, or you shall soon allow  
Left-handed gains work their own punishment.

[Exit.

SENTINEL. I wish he may be found. Chance must decide  
Whether or no, you will not, certainly,  
See me returning hither. Heaven be praised  
I am in safety, past all thought or dream!

[Exit.

### I. 1.

CHORUS. Much is there passing strange;  
Nothing surpassing mankind.  
He it is loves to range  
Over the ocean hoar,  
Thorough the surges' roar,  
South winds raging behind;

Earth, too, wears he away,  
The Mother of Gods on high,  
Tireless, free from decay;  
With team he furrows the ground,  
And the ploughs go round and round,  
As year on year goes by.

### I. 2.

The bird-tribes, light of mind,  
The races of beasts of prey,  
And sea-fish after their kind,  
Man, abounding in wiles,  
Entangles in his toils  
And carries captive away.

The roamers over the hill,  
The field-inhabiting deer,  
By craft he conquers, at will;  
He bends beneath his yoke  
The neck of the steed unbroke,  
And pride of the upland steer.

### II. 1.

He has gotten him speech, and fancy breeze-betost,  
And for the state instinct of order meet;

He has found him shelter from the chilling frost  
 Of a clear sky, and from the arrowy sleet;  
 Illimitable in cunning, cunning-less  
 He meets no change of fortune that can come;  
 He has found escape from pain and helplessness;  
 Only he knows no refuge from the tomb.

## II. 2.

Now bends he to the good, now to the ill,  
 With craft of art, subtle past reach of sight;  
 Wresting his country's laws to his own will,  
 Spurning the sanctions of celestial right;  
 High in the city, he is made city-less,  
 Whoso is corrupt, for his impiety;  
 He that will work the works of wickedness,  
 Let him not house, let him not hold, with me!

At this monstrous vision I stand in  
 Doubt! How dare I say, well knowing her,  
 That this maid is not—Antigone!  
 Daughter of CEdipus!  
 Hapless child, of a hapless father!  
 Sure—ah surely they did not find thee  
 Madly defying our king's commandments,  
 And so prisoner bring thee here?

*Enter SENTINEL with ANTIGONE.*

SENTINEL. This is the woman who has done the deed.  
 We took her burying him. Where's Creon?

I SENATOR. Here  
 Comes he again, out of the house, at need.

*Enter CREON.*

CREON. What is it? In what fit season come I forth?

SENTINEL. My lord, I see a man should never vow  
 He will not do a thing, for second thoughts  
 Bely the purpose. Truly I could have sworn  
 It would be long indeed ere I came hither  
 Under that hail of threats you rained on me.  
 But since an unforeseen happy surprise  
 Passes all other pleasing out of measure,  
 I come, though I forswore it mightily,  
 Bringing this maiden, who was caught in act  
 To set that bier in order. Here, my lord,  
 No lot was cast; this windfall is to me,



And to no other. Take her, now, yourself;  
Examine and convict her, as you please;  
I wash my hands of it, and ought, of right,  
To be clean quit of the scrape, for good and all.  
CREON. You seized—and bring—her! In what way, and whence?  
SENTINEL. Burying that man, herself! You know the whole.  
CREON. Are you in earnest? Do you understand  
What you are saying?

SENTINEL. Yes, that I saw this girl  
Burying that body you forbade to bury.  
Do I speak clear and plain?

CREON. How might this be,

That she was seen, and taken in the act?

SENTINEL. Why thus it happened. When we reached the place,  
Wrought on by those dread menacings from you,  
We swept away all dust that covered up  
The body, and laid the clammy limbs quite bare,  
And windward from the summit of the hill,  
Out of the tainted air that spread from him,  
We sat us down, each, as it might be, rousing  
His neighbour with a clamour of abuse,  
Wakening him up, whenever any one  
Seemed to be slack in watching. This went on,  
Till in mid air the luminous orb of day  
Stood, and the heat grew sultry. Suddenly  
A violent eddy lifted from the ground  
A hurricane, a trouble of the sky;  
Ruffling all foliage of the woodland plain  
It filled the horizon; the vast atmosphere  
Thickened to meet it; we, closing our eyes,  
Endured the Heaven-sent plague. After a while,  
When it had ceased, there stands this maiden in sight,  
And wails aloud, shrill as the bitter note  
Of the sad bird, when as she finds the couch  
Of her void nest robbed of her young; so she,  
Soon as she sees the body stripped and bare,  
Bursts out in shrieks, and calls down curses dire  
On their heads who had done it. Straightway then  
She gathers handfuls of dry dust, and brings them,  
And from a shapely brazen cruse held high  
She crowns the body with drink-offerings,  
Once, twice, and thrice. We at the sight rushed forward,  
And trapped her, nothing daunted, on the spot;  
And taxed her with the past offence, and this  
The present. Not one whit did she deny;  
A pleasant though a pitiful sight to me;

For nothing's sweeter than to have got off  
In person; but to bring into mischance  
Our friends is pitiful. And yet to pay  
No more than this is cheap, to save one's life.  
CREON. Do you, I say—you, with your downcast brow—  
Own or deny that you have done this deed?

ANTIGONE. I say I did it; I deny it not.

CREON. Take yourself hence, whither you will, sir knave;  
You are acquitted of a heavy charge. [Exit SENTINEL.  
Now tell me, not at length, but in brief space,  
Knew you the order not to do it?

ANTIGONE. Yes,

I knew it; what should hinder? It was plain.

CREON. And you made free to overstep my law?

ANTIGONE. Because it was not Zeus who ordered it,  
Nor Justice, dweller with the Nether Gods,  
Gave such a law to men; nor did I deem  
Your ordinance of so much binding force,  
As that a mortal man could overbear

The unchangeable unwritten code of Heaven;

This is not of today and yesterday,

But lives for ever, having origin

Whence no man knows: whose sanctions I were loath

In Heaven's sight to provoke, fearing the will

Of any man. I knew that I should die—

How otherwise? even although your voice

Had never so prescribed. And that I die

Before my hour is due, that I count gain.

For one who lives in many ills, as I—

How should he fail to gain by dying? Thus

To me the pain is light, to meet this fate;

But had I borne to leave the body of him

My mother bare unburied, then, indeed,

I might feel pain; but as it is, I cannot;

And if my present action seems to you

Foolish—'tis like I am found guilty of folly

At a fool's mouth!

1 SENATOR. Lo you, the spirit stout  
Of her stout father's child—unapt to bend  
Beneath misfortune!

CREON. But be well assured,  
Tempers too stubborn are the first to fail;  
The hardest iron from the furnace, forged  
To stiffness, you may see most frequently  
Shivered and broken; and the chafing steeds  
I have known governed with a slender curb.

It is unseemly that a household drudge  
 Should be misproud; but she was conversant  
 With outrage, ever since she passed the bounds  
 Laid down by law; then hard upon that deed  
 Comes this, the second outrage, to exult  
 And triumph in her deed. Truly if here  
 She wield such powers uncensured, she is man,  
 I woman! Be she of my sister born,  
 Or nearer to myself than the whole band  
 Of our domestic tutelary Jove,  
 She, and the sister—for her equally  
 I charge with compassing this funeral—  
 Shall not escape a most tremendous doom.  
 And call her; for within the house but now  
 I saw her, frenzied and beside herself;  
 And it is common for the moody sprite  
 Of plotters in the dark to no good end  
 To have been caught, planning its knavery,  
 Before the deed is acted. None the less  
 I hate it, when one taken in misdoing  
 Straight seeks to gloss the facts!

ANTIGONE. Would you aught more  
 Than take my life, whom you did catch?

CREON. Not I;  
 Take that, take all.

ANTIGONE. Then why do you delay?  
 Since naught is pleasing of your words to me,  
 Or, as I trust, can ever please, so mine  
 Must needs be unacceptable to you.  
 And yet from whence could I have gathered praise  
 More worthily, than from depositing  
 My own brother in a tomb? These, all of them,  
 Would utter one approval, did not fear  
 Seal up their lips. 'Tis tyranny's privilege,  
 And not the least—power to declare and do  
 What it is minded.

CREON. You, of all this people,  
 Are singular in your discernment.

ANTIGONE. Nay,  
 They too discern; they but refrain their tongues  
 At your behest.

CREON. And you are not ashamed  
 That you deem otherwise?

ANTIGONE. It is no shame  
 To pay respect to our own flesh and blood.

CREON. And his dead foeman, was not he your brother

As well?

ANTIGONE. Yes, the same sire's and mother's son.

CREON. Why pay, then, honours which are wrongs to him?

ANTIGONE. The dead clay makes no protest.

CREON. Not although

His with a villain's share your reverence?

ANTIGONE. It was no bondman perished, but a brother.

CREON. Spoiling, I say, this country; while his rival  
Stood for it.

ANTIGONE. All the same, these rites are due  
To the underworld.

CREON. But not in equal measure  
Both for the good man and the bad.

ANTIGONE. Who knows  
This is not piety there?

CREON. The enemy  
Can never be a friend, even in death.

ANTIGONE. Well, I was made for fellowship in love,  
Not fellowship in hate.

CREON. Then get you down  
Thither, and love, if you must love, the dead!  
No woman, while I live, shall order me.

CHORUS. See where out by the doors Ismene  
Weeping drops of sisterly grieving  
Comes; and a cloud o'erhanging her eyebrows  
Mars her dark-flushed cheek, and moistens  
Her fair face with pitiful tears.

*Enter ATTENDANTS with ISMENE.*

CREON. And you—who like a viper unawares  
Have crept into my house, and sucked me bloodless,  
While I unknowingly was fostering you,  
Twin furies, to the upsetting of my throne—  
Come, tell me, will you say you also shared  
This burying, or protest your innocence?

ISMENE. Yes, I have done it—if Antigone  
Says so—I join with her to share the blame.

ANTIGONE. That justice will not suffer; you refused,  
And I—I had no partner.

ISMENE. In your trouble  
I do not blush to claim companionship  
Of what you have to endure.

ANTIGONE. Whose was the deed  
Death and the spirits of the dead can tell!

A friend in words is not a friend for me.

ISMENE. Shame me not, sister, by denying me

A death, for honouring the dead, with you!

ANTIGONE. Mix not your death with mine. Do not claim work  
You did not touch. I shall suffice to die.

ISMENE. And what care I for life, if I lost you?

ANTIGONE. Ask Creon; you are dutiful to him.

ISMENE. Why do you cross me so, to no good purpose?

ANTIGONE. Nay, I am sick at heart, if I do make  
My mock of you.

ISMENE. Nay but what can I do,  
Now, even yet, to help you?

ANTIGONE. Save yourself;  
I do not grudge you your escape.

ISMENE. O me  
Unhappy! And must I miss to share your fate?

ANTIGONE. You made your choice, to live; I mine, to die.

ISMENE. Not if you count my words unsaid.

ANTIGONE. By some  
Your judgment is approved; by others mine.

ISMENE. Then our delinquency is equal, too.

ANTIGONE. Take courage, you are living; but my life  
Long since has died, so I might serve the dead.

CREON. Of these two girls I swear the one even now  
Has been proved witless; the other was so born.

ISMENE. Ah sir, the wretched cannot keep the wit  
That they were born with, but it flits away.

CREON. Yours did so, when you chose to join ill-doers  
In their misdoing.

ISMENE. How could I live on  
Alone, without my sister?

CREON. Do not say  
"My sister"; for you have no sister more.

ISMENE. What, will you put to death your own son's bride?

CREON. He may go further afield—

ISMENE. Not as by troth  
Plighted to her by him.

CREON. Unworthy wives  
For sons of mine I hate.

ANTIGONE. O dearest Hæmon,  
How are you slighted by your father!

CREON. I  
Am weary of your marriage, and of you.

ISMENE. Your own son! will you tear her from his arms?

CREON. Death will prevent that bridal-rite, for me.

I SENATOR. I see, the sentence of this maiden's death  
Has been determined.

CREON. Then we see the same.

An end of trifling. Slaves, there, take them in!  
 As women, henceforth, must they live—not suffered  
 To gad abroad; for even bold men flinch,  
 When they view Death hard by the verge of Life.

[*Exeunt* ANTIGONE and ISMENE, guarded.]

I. 1.

CHORUS. Happy the man whose cup of life is free  
 From taste of evil! If Heaven's influence shake them,  
 No ill but follows, till it overtake them,  
 All generations of his family;  
     Like as when before the sweep  
     Of the sea-borne Thracian blast  
     The surge of ocean coursing past  
 Above the cavern of the deep  
 Rolls up from the region under  
     All the blackness of the shore,  
 And the beaten beaches thunder  
     Answer to the roar.

I. 2.

Woes upon woes on Labdacus' race I see—  
 Living or dead—inveterately descend;  
 And son with sire entangled, without end,  
 And by some God smitten without remedy;  
     For a light of late had spread  
     O'er the last surviving root  
 In the house of CEdipus;  
 Now, the sickle murderous  
 Of the Rulers of the dead,  
 And wild words beyond control,  
 And the frenzy of her own soul,  
     Again mow down the shoot.

II. 1.

Thy power, O God, what pride of man constraineth,  
 Which neither sleep, that all things else enchaineth,  
 Nor even the tireless moons of Heaven destroy?  
     Thy throne is founded fast,  
 High on Olympus, in great brilliancy,  
     Far beyond Time's annoy.  
 Through present and through future and through past  
     Abideth one decree;  
     Nought in excess  
 Enters the life of man without unhappiness.



## II. 2.

For wandering Hope to many among mankind  
 Seems pleasurable; but to many a mind  
 Proves but a mockery of its wild desires.  
 They know not aught, nor fear,  
 Till their feet feel the pathway strewn with fires.  
 "If evil good appear,  
 That soul to his ruin is divinely led"—  
 (Wisely the word was said!)  
 And short the hour  
 He spends unscathed by the avenging power.

Hæmon comes, thy last surviving  
 Child. Is he here to bewail, indignant,  
 His lost bride, Antigone? Grieves he  
 For a vain promise—her marriage-bed?

*Enter HÆMON.*

CREON. We shall know soon, better than seers can tell us.  
 Son, you are here in anger, are you not,  
 Against your sire, hearing his final doom  
 Upon your bride to be? Or are we friends,  
 Always, with you, whate'er our policy?  
 HÆMON. Yours am I, father; and you guide my steps  
 With your good counsels, which for my part I  
 Will follow closely; for there is no marriage  
 Shall occupy a larger place with me  
 Than your direction, in the path of honour.  
 CREON. So is it right, my son, to be disposed—  
 In everything to back your father's quarrel.  
 It is for this men pray to breed and rear  
 In their homes dutiful offspring—to requite  
 The foe with evil, and their father's friend  
 Honour, as did their father. Whoso gets  
 Children unserviceable—what else could he  
 Be said to breed, but troubles for himself,  
 And store of laughter for his enemies?  
 Nay, never fling away your wits, my son,  
 Through liking for a woman; recollect,  
 Cold are embracings, where the wife is naught,  
 Who shares your board and bed. And what worse sore  
 Can plague us, than a loved one's worthlessness?  
 Better to spurn this maiden as a foe!  
 Leave her to wed some bridegroom in the grave!  
 For, having caught her in the act, alone

Of the whole city disobeying me,  
 I will not publicly bely myself,  
 But kill her. Now let her go glorify  
 Her God of kindred! If I choose to cherish  
 My own born kinsfolk in rebelliousness,  
 Then verily I must count on strangers too.  
 For he alone who is a man of worth  
 In his own household will appear upright  
 In the state also; and whoe'er offends  
 Against the laws by violence, or thinks  
 To give commands to rulers—I deny  
 Favour to such. Obedience is due  
 To the state's officer in small and great,  
 Just and unjust commandments; he who pays it  
 I should be confident would govern well,  
 And cheerfully be governed, and abide  
 A true and trusty comrade at my back,  
 Firm in the ranks amid the storm of war.  
 There lives no greater fiend than Anarchy;  
 She ruins states, turns houses out of doors,  
 Breaks up in rout the embattled soldiery;  
 While Discipline preserves the multitude  
 Of the ordered host alive. Therefore it is  
 We must assist the cause of order; this  
 Forbids concession to a feminine will;  
 Better be outcast, if we must, of men,  
 Than have it said a woman worsted us.

1 SENATOR. Unless old age have robbed me of myself,  
 I think the tenor of your words is wise.

HÆMON. Father, the Gods plant reason in mankind,  
 Of all good gifts the highest; and to say  
 You speak not rightly in this, I lack the power;  
 Nor do I crave it. Still, another's thought  
 Might be of service; and it is for me,  
 Being your son, to mark the words, the deeds,  
 And the complaints, of all. To a private man  
 Your frown is dreadful, who has things to say  
 That will offend you; but I secretly  
 Can gather this; how the folk mourn this maid,  
 "Who of all women most unmeriting,  
 For noblest acts dies by the worst of deaths,  
 Who her own brother battle-slain—unburied—  
 Would not allow to perish in the fangs  
 Of carrion hounds or any bird of prey;  
 And" (so the whisper darkling passes round)  
 "Is she not worthy to be carved in gold?"

Father, beside your welfare there is nothing  
 More prized by me; for what more glorious crown  
 Can be to children, than their father's honour?  
 Or to a father, from his sons, than theirs?  
 Do not persist, then, to retain at heart  
 One sole idea, that the thing is right  
 Which your mouth utters, and nought else beside.  
 For all men who believe themselves alone  
 Wise, or that they possess a soul or speech  
 Such as none other, turn them inside out,  
 They are found empty; and though a man be wise,  
 It is no shame for him to live and learn,  
 And not to stretch a course too far. You see  
 How all the trees on winter torrent banks,  
 Yielding, preserve their sprays; those that would stem it  
 Break, roots and all; the shipman too, who keeps  
 The vessel's main-sheet taut, and will not slacken,  
 Goes cruising, in the end, keel uppermost:  
 Let thy wrath go! Be willing to relent!  
 For if some sense, even from a younger head,  
 Be mine to afford, I say it is far better  
 A man should be, for every accident,  
 Furnished with inbred skill; but what of that?  
 Since nature's bent will have it otherwise,  
 'Tis good to learn of those who counsel wisely.  
 I SENATOR. Sir, you might learn, when he speaks seasonably;  
 And you, from him; for both have spoken well.  
 CREON. Men that we are, must we be sent to school  
 To learn discretion of a boy like this?  
 HÆMON. None that's dishonest; and if I am young,  
 It is not well to have regard to years  
 Rather than services.  
 CREON. Good service is it,  
 To pay respect to rebels?  
 HÆMON. To wrongdoers  
 I would not even ask for reverence.  
 CREON. Was it not some such taint infected her?  
 HÆMON. So say not all this populace of Thebes.  
 CREON. The city to prescribe me my decrees!  
 HÆMON. Look, say you so, you are too young in this!  
 CREON. Am I to rule this land after some will  
 Other than mine?  
 HÆMON. A city is no city  
 That is of one man only.  
 CREON. Is not the city  
 Held to be his who rules it?

HÆMON. That were brave—  
 You, a sole monarch of an empty land!  
 CREON. This fellow, it seems, fights on the woman's side.  
 HÆMON. An you be woman! My forethought is for you.  
 CREON. O villain—traversing thy father's rights!  
 HÆMON. Because I see you sinning against right.  
 CREON. Sin I, to cause my sway to be held sacred?  
 HÆMON. You desecrate, by trampling on Heaven's honour.  
 CREON. Foul spotted heart—a woman's follower!  
 HÆMON. You will not find me serving what is vile.  
 CREON. I say this talk of thine is all for her.  
 HÆMON. And you, and me, and for the Gods beneath!  
 CREON. Never shall she live on to marry thee!  
 HÆMON. Die as she may, she shall not die alone.  
 CREON. Art thou grown bold enough to threaten, too?  
 HÆMON. Where is the threat, to speak against vain counsel?  
 CREON. Vain boy, thyself shalt rue thy counselling.  
 HÆMON. I had called you erring, were you not my sire.  
 CREON. Thou woman's bondman, do not spaniel me!  
 HÆMON. Do you expect to speak, and not be answered?  
 CREON. Do I so? By Olympus over us,  
 If thou revile me, and find fault with me,  
 Never believe but it shall cost thee dear!  
 Bring out the wretch, that in his sight, at once,  
 Here, with her bridegroom by her, she may die!  
 HÆMON. Not in my sight, at least—not by my side,  
 Believe it, shall she perish! And for thee—  
 Storm at the friends who choose thy company!  
 My face thou never shalt behold again.  
 I SENATOR. The man is gone, my lord, headlong with rage;  
 And wits so young, when galled, are full of danger.  
 CREON. Let be, let him imagine more, or do,  
 Than mortal may; yet he shall not redeem  
 From sentence those two maidens.  
 I SENATOR. Both of them?  
 Is it your will to slay them both alike?  
 CREON. That is well said; not her who did not touch it.  
 I SENATOR. And by what death mean you to kill the other?  
 CREON. Into some waste untrodden of mankind  
 She shall be drawn, and, in some rock-hewn cave,  
 With only food enough provided her  
 For expiation, so that all the city  
 Escape the guilt of blood, buried alive.  
 There, if she ask him, Hades, the one God  
 Whom she regards, may grant her not to perish;  
 Or there, at latest, she shall recognize  
 It is lost labour to revere the dead.

[Exit.]

[Exit.]

CHORUS. O Love, thou art victor in fight: thou mak'st all things afraid;  
 Thou couchest thee softly at night on the cheeks of a maid;  
 Thou passest the bounds of the sea, and the folds of the fields;  
 To thee the immortal, to thee the ephemeral yields;  
 Thou maddenest them that possess thee; thou turnest astray  
 The souls of the just, to oppress them, out of the way;  
 Thou hast kindled amongst us pride, and the quarrel of kin;  
 Thou art lord, by the eyes of a bride, and the love-light therein;  
 Thou sittest assessor with Right; her kingdom is thine,  
 Who sports with invincible might, Aphrodita divine.

*Enter ANTIGONE, guarded.*

I too, myself, am carried as I look  
 Beyond the bounds of right;  
 Nor can I brook  
 The springing fountain of my tears, to see  
 My child, Antigone,  
 Pass to the chamber of universal night.

I. 1.

ANTIGONE. Behold me, people of my native land:

I wend my latest way:  
 I gaze upon the latest light of day  
 That I shall ever see;  
 Death, who lays all to rest, is leading me  
 To Acheron's far strand  
 Alive; to me no bridal hymns belong,  
 For me no marriage song  
 Has yet been sung; but Acheron instead  
 Is it, whom I must wed.

CHORUS. Nay but with praise and voicings of renown  
 Thou partest for that prison-house of the dead;  
 Unsmitten by diseases that consume,  
 By sword unvisited,  
 Thou only of mortals freely shalt go down,  
 Alive, to the tomb.

I. 2.

ANTIGONE. I have heard tell the sorrowful end of her,  
 That Phrygian sojourner  
 On Sipylus' peak, offspring of Tantalus;  
 How stony shoots upgrown  
 Like ivy bands enclosed her in the stone;  
 With snows continuous  
 And ceaseless rain her body melts away;  
 Streams from her tear-flown head

Water her front; likest to hers the bed

My fate prepares today.

CHORUS. She was of godlike nature, goddess-sprung,  
And we are mortals, and of human race;  
And it were glorious odds  
For maiden slain, among  
The equals of the Gods  
In life—and then in death—to gain a place.

## II. 1.

ANTIGONE. They mock me. Gods of Thebes! why scorn you me

Thus, to my face,

Alive, not death-stricken yet?

O city, and you the city's large-dowered race,

Ye streams from Dirca's source,

Ye woods that shadow Theba's chariot-course,

Listen and see,

Let none of you forget,

How sacrificed, and for what laws offended,

By no tears friended,

I to the prisoning mound

Of a strange grave am journeying under ground.

Ah me unhappy! home is none for me;

Alike in life or death an exile must I be.

CHORUS. Thou to the farthest verge forth-faring,

O my child, of daring,

Against the lofty threshold of the laws

Didst stumble and fall. The cause

Is some ancestral load, which thou art bearing.

## II. 2.

ANTIGONE. There didst thou touch upon my bitterest bale—

A threefold tale—

My father's piteous doom,

Doom of us all, scions of Labdacus.

Woe for my mother's bed!

Woe for the ill-starred spouse, from her own womb

Untimely born!

O what a father's house

Was that from whence I drew my life forlorn!

To whom, unwed,

Accursed, lo I come

To sojourn as a stranger in their home!

And thou too, ruined, my brother, in a wife,

Didst by thy death bring death upon thy sister's life!



CHORUS. To pay due reverence is a duty, too:  
 And power—his power, whose empire is confest,  
 May no wise be transgressed;  
 But thee thine own infatuate mood o'er-threw.

ANTIGONE. Friendless, unwept, unwed,  
 I, sick at heart, am led  
 The way prepared for me;  
 Day's hallowed orb on high  
 I may no longer see;  
 For me no tears are spent,  
 Nor any friends lament  
 The death I die.

*Enter CREON.*

CREON. Think you that any one, if help might be  
 In wailing and lament before he died,  
 Would ever make an end? Away with her!  
 Wall her up close in some deep catacomb,  
 As I have said; leave her alone, apart,  
 To perish, if she will; or if she live,  
 To make her tomb her tenement. For us,  
 We will be guiltless of this maiden's blood;  
 But here on earth she shall abide no more.

ANTIGONE. Thou Grave, my bridal chamber! dwelling-place  
 Hollowed in earth, the everlasting prison  
 Whither I bend my steps, to join the band  
 Of kindred, whose more numerous host already  
 Persephone hath counted with the dead;  
 Of whom I last and far most miserably  
 Descend, before my term of life is full;  
 I come, cherishing this hope especially,  
 To win approval in my father's sight,  
 Approval too, my mother, in thine, and thine  
 Dear brother! for that with these hands I paid  
 Unto you dead lavement and ordering  
 And sepulchre-libations; and that now,  
 Polynices, in the tendance of thy body  
 I meet with this reward. Yet to the wise  
 It was no crime, that I did honour thee.  
 For never had I, even had I been  
 Mother of children, or if spouse of mine  
 Lay dead and mouldering, in the state's despite  
 Taken this task upon me. Do you ask  
 What argument I follow here of law?  
 One husband dead, another might be mine;  
 Sons by another, did I lose the first;

But, sire and mother buried in the grave,  
 A brother is a branch that grows no more.  
 Yet I, preferring by this argument  
 To honour thee to the end, in Creon's sight  
 Appear in that I did so to offend,  
 And dare to do things heinous, O my brother!  
 And for this cause he hath bid lay hands on me,  
 And leads me, not as wives or brides are led,  
 Unblest with any marriage, any care  
 Of children; destitute of friends, forlorn,  
 Yet living, to the chambers of the dead  
 See me descend. Yet what celestial right  
 Did I transgress? How should I any more  
 Look up to heaven, in my adversity?  
 Whom should I call to aid? Am I not come  
 Through piety to be held impious? If  
 This is approved in Heaven, why let me suffer,  
 And own that I have sinned; but if the sin  
 Belong to these—O may their punishment  
 Be measured by the wrongfulness of mine!  
 SENATOR. Still the same storms possess her, with the same  
 Precipitance of spirit.

CREON. Then for this  
 Her guards shall rue their slowness.

ANTIGONE. Woe for me!  
 The word I hear comes hand in hand with death!

SENATOR. I may not say Be comforted, for this  
 Shall not be so; I have no words of cheer.

ANTIGONE. O City of Theba! O my country! Gods,  
 The Fathers of my race! I am led hence—

I linger now no more. Behold me, lords,  
 The last of your kings' house—what doom is mine,

And at whose hands, and for what cause—that I

Duly performed the dues of piety! [Exeunt ANTIGONE and GUARDS.

# I. 1.

CHORUS. For a dungeon brazen-barred

The body of Danae endured

To exchange Heaven's daylight of old,

In a tomb-like chamber immured,

Hid beneath fetter and guard;

And she was born, we are told,

O child, my child, unto honour,

And a son was begotten upon her

To Zeus in a shower of gold.

But the stress of a Fate is hard;  
 Nor wealth, nor warfare, nor ward,  
 Nor black ships cleaving the sea  
 Can resist her, or flee.

## I. 2.

And the Thracians' king, Dryas' son,  
 The hasty of wrath, was bound  
 For his words of mocking and pride;  
 Dionysus closing him round,  
 Pent in a prison of stone;  
 Till, his madness casting aside  
 Its flower and fury wild,  
 He knew what God he reviled—  
 Whose power he had defied;  
 Restraining the Mænad choir,  
 Quenching the Evian fire,  
 Enraging the Muses' throng,  
 The lovers of song.

## II. 1.

And by the twofold main  
 Of rocks Cyanean—there  
 Lies the Bosporean strand,  
 And the lone Thracian plain  
 Of Salmydessus, where  
 Is Ares' border-land:  
 Who saw the stab of pain  
 Dealt on the Phineid pair  
 At that fierce dame's command;  
 Blinding the orbits of their blasted sight,  
 Smitten, without spear to smite,  
 By a spindle's point made bare,  
 And by a bloody hand.

## II. 2.

They mourned their mother dead,  
 Their hearts with anguish wrung,  
 Wasting away, poor seed  
 Of her deserted bed;  
 Who, Boreas' daughter, sprung  
 From the old Erechtheid breed,  
 In remote caverns fed  
 Her native gales among,  
 Went swiftly as the steed,

Offspring of Heaven, over the steep-down wild;  
 Yet to her too, my child,  
     The Destinies, that lead  
     Lives of long ages, clung.

*Enter TIRESIAS led by a boy.*

TIRESIAS. Princes of Thebes, two fellow-travellers.  
 Debtors in common to the eyes of one,  
 We stand before you; for a blind man's path  
 Hangs on the guide who marshals him the way.

CREON. What would'st thou now, reverend Tiresias?

TIRESIAS. That will I tell. Do thou obey the seer.

CREON. I never have departed hitherto  
 From thy advice.

TIRESIAS.                      And therefore 'tis, thou steerest  
 The city's course straight forward.

CREON.    Thou hast done me  
 Good service, I can witness.

TIRESIAS.                                      Now again  
 Think, thou dost walk on fortune's razor-edge.  
 CREON. What is it? I tremble but to see thee speak.  
 TIRESIAS. Listen to what my art foreshadoweth,  
 And thou shalt know. I lately, taking seat  
 On my accustomed bench of augury,  
 Whither all tribes of fowl after their kind  
 Always resort, heard a strange noise of birds  
 Screaming with harsh and dissonant impetus;  
 And was aware how each the other tore  
 With murderous talons; for the whirr of wings  
 Rose manifest. Then feared I, and straight made trial  
 Of sacrifices on the altar-hearths  
 All blazing; but, out of the offerings,  
 There sprang no flame; only upon embers charred  
 Thick droppings melted off the thigh-pieces,  
 And heaved and sputtered, and the gall-bladders  
 Burst, and were lost, while from the folds of fat  
 The loosened thigh-bones fell. Such auguries,  
 Failing of presage through the unseemliness  
 Of holy rites, I gather from this lad,  
 Who is to me, as I to others, guide.  
 And this state-sickness comes by thy self-will;  
 For all our hearths and altars are defiled  
 With prey of dogs and fowl, who have devoured  
 The dead unhappy son of CEdipus.  
 Therefore the Gods accept not of us now  
 Solemn peace-offering or burnt sacrifice,

Nor bird trills out a happy-boding note,  
 Gorged with the fatness of a slain man's blood.  
 This, then, my son, consider; that to err  
 From the right path is common to mankind;  
 But having erred, that mortal is no more  
 Losel or fool, who medicines the ill  
 Wherein he fell, and stands not obstinate.  
 Conceit of will savours of emptiness.  
 Give place, then, in the presence of the dead.  
 Wound not the life that's perished. Where's thy valour  
 In slaying o'er the slain? Well I advise,  
 Meaning thee well; 'tis pleasantest to learn  
 Of good advisers, when their words bring gain.  
 CREON. Old man, ye all, like archers at a mark,  
 Are loosing shafts at me; I am not spared  
 Even your soothsayers' practice; by whose tribe  
 Long since have I been made as merchandize,  
 And bought, and sold. Gather your gains at will!  
 Market your Sardian silver, Indian gold!  
 That man ye shall not cover with a tomb;  
 Not though the eagle ministers of Jove  
 To Jove's own throne should bear their prey of him,  
 Not even for horror at such sacrilege  
 Will I permit his burial. This I know;  
 There is no power in any man to touch  
 The Gods with sacrilege; but foul the falls  
 Which men right cunning fall, Tiresias—  
 Old man, I say—when for the sake of gain  
 They speak foul treason with a fair outside.  
 TIRESIAS. Alas, does no man know, does no man think—  
 CREON. What should one think? What common saw is this?  
 TIRESIAS. How far good counsel passes all things good?  
 CREON. So far, I think, folly's the worst of harm!  
 TIRESIAS. That is the infirmity that fills thy nature.  
 CREON. I care not to retort upon thee, seer.  
 TIRESIAS. Thou dost, thou say'st my oracles are false.  
 CREON. All the prophetic tribe are covetous.  
 TIRESIAS. And that of kings fond of disgraceful gain.  
 CREON. Know'st thou of whom thou speak'st? I am thy lord.  
 TIRESIAS. Yea, thou hast saved the state; I gave it thee.  
 CREON. Thou art a wise seer, but in love with wrong.  
 TIRESIAS. Thou wilt impel me to give utterance  
 To my still dormant prescience.  
 CREON. Say on;  
 Only beware thou do not speak for gain.  
 TIRESIAS. For gain of thine, methinks, I do not speak.

CREON. Thou shalt not trade upon my wits, be sure.  
 TIRESIAS. And be thou sure of this; thou shalt not tell  
 Many more turns of the sun's chariot-wheel,  
 Ere thou shalt render satisfaction, one  
 From thy own loins in payment, dead for dead,  
 For that thou hast made Life join hands with Death,  
 And sent a living soul unworthily  
 To dwell within a tomb, and keep'st a corpse  
 Here, from the presence of the Powers beneath,  
 Not for thy rights or any God's above,  
 But lawlessly in their despite usurped,  
 Unhallowed, disappointed, uninterred;  
 Wherefore the late-avenging punishers,  
 Furies, from Death and Heaven, lay wait for thee,  
 To take thee in the evil of thine own hands.  
 Look to it, whether I be bribed who speak;  
 For as to that, with no great wear of time,  
 Men's, women's wails to thine own house shall answer.  
 Also all cities rise in enmity,  
 To the strorn relics of whose citizens  
 None pays due hallowing, save beasts of prey,  
 Dogs, or some fowl, whose pinions to their gates—  
 Yea, to each hearth—bear taint defiling them.  
 Such bolts, in wrath, since thou dar'st anger me,  
 I loosen at thy bosom, archer-like,  
 Sure-aimed, whose burning smart thou shalt not shun.  
 Lead me away, boy, to my own home again;  
 And let him vent his spleen on younger men,  
 And learn to keep a tongue more gentle, and  
 A brain more sober, than he carries now.

[*Exeunt TIRESIAS and BOY.*]

I SENATOR. The seer is gone, my lord, denouncing woe;  
 And from the day my old hairs began to indue  
 Their white for black, we have known him for a watch  
 Who never barked to warn the state in vain.

CREON. I know it too; and I am ill at ease;  
 'Tis bitter to submit; but Até's hand  
 Smites bitterly on the spirit that abides her.

I SENATOR. Creon Menœceus' son, be wise at need!

CREON. What should I do? speak, I will hearken.

I SENATOR.

Go,

Set free the maiden from the vault, and build  
 A tomb for that dead outcast.

CREON. You approve it?

You deem that I should yield?

I SENATOR. Sir, with all speed.

Swift-footed come calamities from Heaven



To cut off the perverse.

CREON. O God, 'tis hard!

But I quit heart, and yield; I cannot fight

At odds with destiny.

I SENATOR. Up then, to work!

Commit it not to others!

CREON. I am gone

Upon the instant. Quickly, quickly men,

You and your fellows, get you, axe in hand,

Up to the place, there, yonder; and because

I am thus minded, other than before,

I who did bind her will be there to loose;

For it misgives me it is best to keep

The old appointed laws, all our life long. [*Exeunt CREON and ATTENDANTS.*]

I. 1.

CHORUS. Thou by many names address,

Child of Zeus loud-thundering,

Glory of a Theban maid,

Who unbidden wanderest

Fair Italia's King,

And art lord in each deep glade

Whither all men seek to her,

Eleusinian Demeter;

Bacchus, who by soft-flowing waters

Of Ismenus habitest

Theba, mother of Bacchant daughters,

With the savage Dragon's stock,

I. 2.

Thee the lurid wild-fire meets

O'er the double-crested rock,

Where Corycian Nymphs arow

Bacchic-wise ascending go,

Thee Castalia's rill;

Thee the ivy-covered capes

Usher forth of Nysa's hill,

And the shore with green of grapes

Clustering, where the hymn to thee

Rises up immortally,

Visitant in Theban Streets,

"Evoe, O Evoe!"

II. 1.

Wherefore, seeing thy City thus—

City far above all other

Dear to thee, and her, thy mother  
 Lightning-slain—by sickness grievous  
 Holden fast in all her gates,  
 Come with quickness to relieve us,  
 By the slopes of Parnassus,  
 Or the roaring straits.

## II. 2.

Hail to thee, the first advancing  
 In the stars' fire-breathing chorus!  
 Leader of the nightly strain,  
 Boy and son of Zeus and King!  
 Manifest thyself before us  
 With thy frenzied Thyiad train,  
 Who their lord Iacchus dancing  
 Praise, and all night sing.

*Enter a MESSENGER.*

MESSENGER. You citizens who dwell beside the roof  
 Of Cadmus and Amphion, there is no sort  
 Of human life that I could ever praise,  
 Or could dispraise, as constant; Fortune still  
 Raising and Fortune overthrowing still  
 The happy and the unhappy; and none can read  
 What is set down for mortals. Creon, methought  
 Was enviable erewhile, when he preserved  
 This land of Cadmus from its enemies,  
 And took the country's absolute monarchy,  
 And ruled it, flourishing with a noble growth  
 From his own seed; and now, he has lost all.  
 For when men forfeit all their joys in life,  
 One in that case I do not count alive,  
 But deem of him as of some animate corse.  
 Pile now great riches, if thou wilt, at home;  
 Wear thou the living semblance of a king;  
 An if delight be lacking, all the rest  
 I would not purchase, as compared with joy,  
 From any, for the shadow of a shade.

I SENATOR. What new affliction to the royal stock  
 Com'st thou to tell?

MESSENGER. Death is upon them—death  
 Caused by the living.

I SENATOR. And who is the slayer?  
 Speak! who the victim?

MESSENGER. Hæmon is no more;

His life-blood spilt, and by no stranger's hand.

I SENATOR. What, by his father's, or his own?

MESSENGER. Self-slaughtered;

Wroth with his father for the maiden slain.

I SENATOR. Prophet! how strictly is thy word come true!

MESSENGER. Look to the future, for these things are so.

I SENATOR. And I behold the poor Eurydice

Come to us from the palace, Creon's wife;

Either of chance, or hearing her son's name.

*Enter EURYDICE.*

EURYDICE. O all you citizens, I heard the sound

Of your discourse, as I approached the gates,

Meaning to bring my prayers before the face

Of Pallas; even as I undid the bolts,

And set the door ajar, a voice of woe

To my own household pierces through my ears;

And I sink backward on my handmaidens

Afaint for terror; but whate'er the tale,

Tell it again; I am no novice, I,

In misery, that hearken.

MESSENGER. Dear my mistress,

I saw, and I will speak, and will let slip

No syllable of the truth. Why should we soothe

Your ears with stories, only to appear

Liars thereafter? Truth is always right.

—I followed in attendance on your lord,

To the flat hill top, where spitefully

Was lying yet, harried by dogs, the body

Of Polynices. Pluto's name, and hers,

The wayside goddess, we invoked, to stay

Their anger and be favourable; and him

We washed with pure lustration, and consumed

On fresh-lopped branches the remains of him,

And piled a monument of natal earth

High over all; thence to the maiden's cell,

Chamber of death, with bridal couch of stone,

We made as if to enter. But afar

One fellow hears a loud uplifted wail

Fill all the unhallowed precinct; comes, and tells.

His master, Creon; the uncertain sound

Of piteous crying, as he draws more nigh,

Comes round him, and he utters, groaning loud

A lamentable plaint; "Me miserable!

Was I a prophet? Is this path I tread

The unhappiest of all ways I ever went?

My son's voice thrills my ear. What ho, my guard!  
 Run quickly thither to the tomb where stones  
 Have been dragged down to make an opening,  
 Go in and look, whether I really hear  
 The voice of Hæmon, or am duped by Heaven."  
 Quickly, at our distracted lord's command,  
 We looked: and in the tomb's inmost recess  
 Found we her, as she had been hanged by the neck,  
 Fast in a strip-like loop of linen; and him  
 Laid by her, clasping her about the waist,  
 Mourning his wedlock severed in the grave,  
 And his sire's deeds, and his ill-fated bride.  
 He, when he sees them, with a terrible cry  
 Goes in towards him, calling out aloud  
 "Ah miserable, what hast thou done? what mind  
 Hadst thou? by what misfortune art thou crazed?  
 Come out, my son,—suppliant I ask of thee!"  
 But with fierce aspect the youth glared at him;  
 Spat in his face; answered him not a word;  
 Grasped at the crossed hilts of his sword and drew it,  
 And—for the father started forth in flight—  
 Missed him! then, angered with himself, poor fool,  
 There as he stood he flung himself along  
 Upon the sword-point firmly planted in  
 The middle of his breast, and, conscious yet,  
 Clings to the maid, clasped in his failing arms,  
 And gasping, sends forth on the pallid cheek  
 Fast welling drops of blood: So lies he, dead,  
 With his arms round the dead; there, in the grave  
 His bridal rite is full; his misery  
 Is witness to mankind what worst of woe  
 The lack of counsel brings a man to know! [Exit EURYDICE.]

I SENATOR. What do you make of this? The woman's gone  
 Back, and without one word, of good or bad!

MESENTER. I marvel too; and yet I am in hope  
 She would not choose, hearing her son's sad fate,  
 In public to begin her keening-cry;  
 But rather to her handmaids in the house  
 Dictate the mourning for a private pain.  
 She is not ignorant of self-control,  
 That she should err.

I SENATOR. I know not; but on me  
 Weigh heavily both silence over-much,  
 And loud complaint in vain.

MESENTER. Well, we shall know it,  
 If she hide aught within a troubled heart

Even to suppression of its utterance,  
 If we approach the house. Yes, you say truly,  
 It does weigh heavy, silence over-much.

[*Exit.*]

CHORUS. Lo now, Creon himself draws near us,  
 Claspings a record  
 Manifest, if we sin not, saying it,  
 Of ruin unwrought by the hands of others,  
 But fore-caused by his own self-will.

*Enter CREON, attended, with the body of HÆMON.*

I. 1.

CREON. O sins of a mind  
 That is minded to stray!  
 Mighty to bind  
 And almighty to slay!  
 Behold us, kin slayers and slain, O ye who stand by the way!

Ah, newness of death!  
 O my fruitless design!  
 New to life's breath,  
 O son that wert mine,  
 Ah, ah, thou art dead, thou art sped, for a fault that was mine, not thine!

I SENATOR. Ah, how thou seem'st to see the truth, too late!  
 CREON. Ah yes, I have learnt, I know my wretchedness!

II. 1.

Heaviness hath o'ertaken me  
 And mine head the rod;  
 The roughness hath shaken me  
 Of the paths I trod;  
 Woe is me! my delight is brought low, cast under the feet of a God!  
 Woe for man's labours that are profitless!

*Re-enter the MESSENGER.*

MESSENGER. O master, now thou hast and hast in store  
 Of sorrows; one thou bearest in thine arms,  
 And one at home thou seemest to be come  
 Merely to witness.

CREON. And what more of sorrow,  
 Or what more sorrowful, is yet behind?

MESSENGER. Thy wife, the mother—mother of the dead—  
 Is, by a blow just fallen, haplessly slain.

## I. 2.

CREON. O hard to appease thee,  
       Haven of Death,  
 How should it please thee  
       To end this breath?

O herald of heavy news, what is this thy mouth uttereth?

O man, why slayest thou  
       A man that is slain?  
 Alas, how sayest thou  
       Anew and again

That the slaying of a woman is added to slaying—a pain to a pain?

MESSENGER. See for thyself; the palace doors unclosed.

*The Altar is disclosed, with the dead body of Eurydice.*

CREON. Woe is me again, for this new sorrow I see.

## II. 2.

What deed is not done?  
       What tale is not told?  
 Thy body, O son,  
       These arms enfold—

Dead—wretch that I am! Dead, too, is the face these eyes behold.

Ah, child, for thy poor mother! ah for thee!

MESSENGER. She with a sharp-edged dagger in her heart  
 Lies at the altar; and her darkened lids  
 Close on her wailing for the glorious lot  
 Of Megareus, who died before, and next  
 For his, and last, upon her summoning  
 Evil to fall on thee, the child-slayer!

## III. 1.

CREON. Alas, I faint for dread!  
       Is there none will deal  
       A thrust that shall lay me dead  
       With the two-edged steel?  
 Ah woe is me!  
 I am all whelmed in utter misery!

MESSENGER. It may be so; thou art arraigned of her  
 Who here lies dead, for the occasion thou  
 Hast wrought for Destiny on her, and him.

I SENATOR. In what way did she slay herself and die?



MESSENGER. Soon as she heard the raising of the wail  
For her son's death, she stabbed herself to the heart.

## IV. 1.

CREON. Woe is me! to none else can they lay it,  
This guilt, but to me!  
I, I was the slayer, I say it,  
Unhappy, of thee!  
O bear me, haste ye, spare not,  
To the ends of earth,  
More nothing than they who were not  
In the hour of birth!

I SENATOR. Thou counsell'est well—if anything be well  
To follow, in calamity; the ills  
Lying in our path, soonest o'erpast, were best.

## III. 2.

CREON. Come, thou most welcome Fate,  
Appear, O come;  
Bring my days' final date,  
Fill up their sum!  
Come quick, I pray;  
Let me not look upon another day!

I SENATOR. This for to-morrow; we must take some thought  
On that which lies before us; for these griefs,  
They are their care on whom the care has fallen.

CREON. I did but join your prayer for our desire.

I SENATOR. Pray thou for nothing more; there is no respite  
To mortals from the ills of destiny.

## IV. 2.

CREON. Lead me forth, cast me out, no other  
Than a man undone;  
Who did slay, unwitting, thy mother  
And thee, my son!  
I turn me I know not where  
For my plans ill-spiced,  
And a doom that is heavy to bear  
Is come down on my head. *[Exit CREON. attended.]*

CHORUS. Wisdom first for a man's well-being  
Maketh, of all things. Heaven's insistence  
Nothing allows of man's irreverence;  
And great blows great speeches avenging,  
Dealt on a boaster,  
Teach men wisdom in age, at last. *[Exeunt omnes.]*

# ELECTRA

## PERSONS REPRESENTED

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon, the late king of Argos and Mycenæ, and of Clytæmnestra.*

PYLADES, *friend to Orestes.*

*An old Attendant, Guardian to Orestes.*

ELECTRA,  
CHRYSOthemis, } *daughters of Agamemnon and Clytæmnestra.*

CLYTÆMNESTRA, *queen of Argos and Mycenæ.*

ÆGISTHUS, *cousin to Agamemnon, and in his lifetime the paramour of Clytæmnestra.*

*The CHORUS is composed of Ladies of Mycenæ, friends to Electra. Attendants on Clytæmnestra.*

SCENE:—Before the Palace at Mycenæ.

*Enter ORESTES, PYLADES and GUARDIAN.*

GUARDIAN. Son of our Captain in the wars of Troy,  
Great Agamemnon, it is given thee now  
With thine own eyes, Orestes, to behold  
Those scenes thou hast ever longed for. Here it lies,  
Argos, the ancient land of thy desire;  
The sacred glade of her the gadfly drave,  
Inachus' daughter; that's the Agora  
They call Lycean, from the wolf-slaying God;  
This, on the left, Hera's renowned fane;  
And from the point we are reaching you can swear  
You see Mycenæ's Golden City, and this,  
The death-fraught house of Pelops' family;  
Whence I received you at your sister's hands,  
And saved you from the slaughter of your sire,  
And carried you away, and fostered you  
So far toward manhood, ready to revenge  
A father's blood. Wherefore, Orestes, now—  
And Pylades, thou dearest of allies—  
Take we brief counsel what is right to do;  
For see, already the bright gleam of day  
Calls up the birds to sing their matins clear  
Above us, and the sable star-lit night  
Has passed away. Now, before any man  
Comes forth abroad, join you in conference;  
For where we stand, it is no season more

To hesitate; the hour is come for action.

ORESTES. My faithfulest of followers, what clear signs  
You manifest of your good will to us!

For as a generous steed, though he be old,

Beset with difficulties, pricks his ears

And bates not of his courage, you impart

Spirit to us, and lag no whit behind.

As you desire, I will unfold my scheme;

Do you the while mark my words heedfully,

And if I miss the target, mend my aim.

Late, when I sought the Pythian oracle,

To learn how I might execute revenge

Upon my father's murderers, Phœbus gave me

Answer in this sort; I will tell it you;

*I by myself unarmed with shields and martial bands*

*By craft held condign slaughter hidden in my hands.*

Well, with this answer sounding in our ears,

Go you, as opportunity may lead,

Into the house, and gather all that passes,

And bring us word of all; for in old age,

And so long after, they will never know

Now, nor suspect you, frosted thus by time.

Tell your tale thus; you are a citizen

Of Phocis, and you come from Phanoteus,

Who is their best ally; tell them (and swear it)

Orestes has been killed by accident,

By a fall from his chariot, at the Pythian games;

Let it stand so. We, as He bade, the while,

First with libations and shorn curls of hair

Will deck my father's grave; then back again

Return, carrying an urn of beaten brass,

(The same, you know, that in the brake lies hidden,)

That in feigned words we may convey to them

Glad tidings—how my body is destroyed,

Burnt up already and made embers of!

For where's the harm to be called dead, when really

I am alive, and gather praise thereby?

No word that profits us can hurt, I fancy.

Why, I have seen men often, who were wise,

Falsely pretending death; then, when again

They came back home, they have been more prized than ever;

So I expect yet, out of this report,

To blaze forth, star-like, living, on my foes.

But O my native land! Gods of the soil!

Welcome me with good fortune in these ways;

And thou, paternal Home! for I thy cleanser

Come here of right, the ambassador of Heaven;  
 Send me not with dishonour from this land,  
 But grant me to inherit and set up  
 The old estate.—I have spoken. Now, old friend,  
 Be it your care to guard your post; go forward;  
 And let us forth. It is the season; this,  
 In every action, is men's best ally.

ELECTRA (*within*). Ah woe is me!

GUARDIAN. Hark!

I thought I heard some handmaiden cry faintly  
 Inside the doors, my son!

ORESTES. Is it perhaps  
 The wronged Electra? Shall we stay awhile  
 And listen to her sorrowing?

GUARDIAN. By no means.  
 Do nothing ere performing what is bidden  
 Of Loxias, and initiate all from thence,  
 Pouring lustrations on your father's grave.  
 This wafts us victory, and nerves our doings.

[*Exeunt.*]

*Enter* ELECTRA.

ELECTRA. Holy Light, with Earth, and Sky,  
 Whom thou fillest equally,  
 Ah how many a note of woe,  
 Many a self-inflicted blow  
 On my scarred breast might'st thou mark,  
 Ever as recedes the dark;  
 Known, too, all my nightlong cheer  
 To bitter bed and chamber drear,  
 How I mourn my father lost,  
 Whom on no barbarian coast  
 Did red Ares greet amain,  
 But as woodmen cleave an oak  
 My mother's axe dealt murderous stroke,  
 Backed by the partner of her bed,  
 Fell Ægisthus, on his head;  
 Whence no pity, save from me,  
 O my father, flows for thee,  
 So falsely, foully slain.  
 Yet I will not cease from sighing,  
 Cease to pour my bitter crying,  
 While I see this light of day,  
 Or the stars' resplendent play,  
 Uttering forth a sound of wail,  
 Like the child-slayer, the nightingale,  
 Here before my father's door

Crying to all men evermore.  
 O Furies dark, of birth divine!  
 O Hades wide, and Proserpine!  
 Thou nether Hermes! Ara great!  
 Ye who regard the untimely dead,  
 The dupes of an adulterous bed,  
 Come ye, help me, and require  
 The foul murder of our sire;  
 And send my brother back again;  
 Else I may no more sustain  
 Grief's overmastering weight.

*Enter* CHORUS of LADIES OF MYCENÆ.

CHORUS. O child, Electra, child  
 Of one too fatally bold,  
 How sighest thou, unsatisfied yet,  
 Evermore wasting away,  
 For him, Agamemnon, beguiled  
 By thy crafty mother of old,  
 Spite of all Gods, in her net,  
 To base hands given for a prey?  
 Accurst be the author of this!

If I pray not amiss.

ELECTRA. O women of noble strain,  
 Ye are come to solace my pain;  
 I know it, I well perceive;  
 It escapes me not at all;  
 Howbeit I will not leave  
 To lament my father's fall.  
 Ye my love who repay  
 With all love ever gave,  
 Ah let me be, I pray,  
 Leave me to rave.

CHORUS. But not from Hades below,  
 Not from the all-welcoming shore,  
 Even with strong crying and prayer  
 Canst thou raise thy father again.  
 Past all measure in woe  
 Thou art perishing evermore,  
 Sinking deep in despair,  
 Where no release is from pain;  
 Ah why so bent upon grief,  
 Too sore for relief?

ELECTRA. None but fools could forget  
 Their fathers' wrongs, who are gone.  
 But on her my fancy is set,

The bird, Heaven's messenger,  
Wildly bemoaning her  
For Itys, Itys alone!  
O forlorn Niobe,  
As one godlike I deem of thee,  
Alas! that abidest, weeping,

In a rock-tomb's keeping!

CHORUS. Not first of mortals with thee,  
Daughter, did sorrow begin;  
Whereas thou passest the rest,  
Thy kith and kindred within,  
The life Chrysothemis lives,  
And Iphianassa, and he  
In the flower of his youth who grieves,  
Hid, but not all unblest,  
Whom the land, Mycenæ fair,  
Will receive, her princes' heir,  
When he, Orestes, shall come

By Heaven's guidance home.

ELECTRA. Whom I wait for, and go  
Ceaselessly wet with tears,  
Unespoused, childless, forlorn,  
Bearing still, as I must,  
The unending burden of woe;  
But he forgets with the years  
All he has heard and borne;  
For what message comes I can trust?  
Ever he longs to be here—

He will not appear!

CHORUS. Nay cheer thee, cheer thee, my child;  
God in the Heavens is yet great,  
Who surveys all else and commands.  
Leave thou then in his hands  
Anger—the excess of regret,  
Nor chide overmuch—nor forget  
Those whom thou needs must hate.  
For Time is a God right mild;  
Nor can Agamemnon's son  
By Crisa's pastoral shore,  
Nor the monarch of Acheron,

Be deaf evermore.

ELECTRA. But already most of my day,  
Hopeless, has faded away;  
I can do no longer withal;  
Without parents to cherish me I waste,  
Without husband's love, to defend;



Yea alien-like, disgraced,  
 I inhabit my father's hall,  
 And in this guise attend  
 At a board with no feast laid,  
 Uncomely arrayed.

CHORUS. At his return arose  
 A burden of woes—of woes  
 To thy father's resting-place,  
 What time was darted a thrust,  
 From fangs all brass, at his face.  
 Fraud was deviser—Lust  
 Was slayer—embodying the shade  
 Of a fell deed foully planned,  
 Yea, whether by heavenly aid  
 Or a mortal's hand.

ELECTRA. O day that far beyond all  
 Dawned most hateful to see!  
 O night—O sorrows abhorred  
 Of that ghastly festival—  
 Murder done villainously  
 On my sire, by the hands of twain  
 Who took my life as a prey,  
 Who annihilated me!  
 Whom may God with rightful reward,  
 The Olympian Power, again  
 For their deeds amply repay,  
 Nor let them compass their bliss  
 By an act like this!

CHORUS. Take heed; say no more.  
 Hast thou no consciousness  
 Out of what wealth before  
 Thou fall'st thus miserably  
 Into ills that abide with thee?  
 Thou hast wrought thee woes in excess,  
 Bringing forth strife on strife  
 To the heaviness of thy life;  
 And is it so easy a thing  
 To contend with a king?

ELECTRA. Hard is my fate, full hard;  
 I know it; I am mad, I confess;  
 Yet not for the fates that oppress  
 Will I keep this wrath under guard,  
 The while my life shall endure!  
 For from whom, companions dear,  
 Should I submissively hear  
 Reason, or from whom, that is wise,

Counsel, fit for mine ear?  
 Let me be; cease to advise;  
 All this must pass without cure;  
 I shall never be free from distress,  
     And laments numberless.  
 CHORUS. Yet I bid thee, faithful still,  
 As a mother, and in good will,  
 Do not add new ill unto ill.  
 ELECTRA. And where should a limit be set  
     For evil to spread?  
 Or how is it well, to forget  
     The cause of the dead?  
 In what man's heart  
     Could a plant like this find place?  
 Be mine no part  
     In such men's favour or grace!  
 Nor, if with any good things  
     My fortune is blent,  
 Be it mine to rest in content,  
     And fetter the wings  
 Of piercing cries, or tire,  
     Praising my sire.  
 For if in the earth, as nought,  
     The dead must lie,  
 And these, in return, who ought,  
     The slayers, not die,  
 Then farewell honour, and fall  
     Men's reverence, all!

1 LADY. I came, my daughter, zealous for your good  
 As for my own; but if I say not well,  
 Have it your way; for we will follow you.  
 ELECTRA. I am ashamed, dear ladies, if to you  
 Through frequent lamentations I appear  
 Too sorely oppressed; but, for necessity  
 Obliges me to do so, pardon me.  
 For how should any woman gently born,  
 Viewing the sorrows of her father's house,  
 Do otherwise than I, who witness them  
 For ever day by day and night by night  
 Rather increase than lessen? to whom, first,  
 The mother's face who bare me has become  
 Most hostile; next, I must be companied  
 In my own home with my sire's murderers,  
 By them be ruled, take at their hands, or else  
 At their hands hunger! Then, what sort of days

Do you suppose I lead, when I behold  
Ægisthus seated on my father's throne,  
Wearing the selfsame garments which he wore,  
And pouring out libations on the hearth  
By which he slew him? When I witness, too,  
The consummation of their impudence,  
The homicide lying in my father's bed  
With that abandoned mother—if it be right  
To call her mother, who consorts with him!  
And she—so profligate that she lives on  
With her blood-guilty mate—fearing no vengeance—  
Rather, as if exulting in her doings—  
Looks out the day on which by cunning erst  
She slew my father, and each month on it  
Sets dances going, and sacrifices sheep  
In offering to her guardian deities!  
I see it, I, ill fated one! At home  
I weep and waste and sorrow as I survey  
The unblest feast that bears my father's name,  
In private; for I cannot even weep  
So freely as my heart would have me do;  
For this tongue-valiant woman with vile words  
Upbraids me, crying "Thou God-forsaken thing,  
Has no man's father died, save only thine?  
Is nobody in mourning, except thee?  
Ill death betide thee, and the nether Gods  
Give thee no end to these thy sorrowings!"  
So she reviles; save when she hears it said  
Orestes is at hand; then instantly  
She is possest, and comes and screams at me—  
"Is it not you who are the cause of this?  
Pray is not this your doing, who stole Orestes  
Out of my hands, and conjured him away?  
But mind you, you shall pay me well for it!"  
So snarling, there joins with her and stands by  
And hounds her forward her illustrious groom,  
The all unmanly, all injurious pest,  
Who fights no battles without women! I,  
Waiting and waiting, till Orestes come  
And end it, miserably daily die.  
For always meaning, never doing, he  
Has utterly confounded all my hopes  
Remote or present. Friends, in such a case,  
There is no room—no, not for soberness  
Or piety; but, beneath injuries,  
There is deep need we prove injurious, too!

1 LADY. Stay, tell me, is it with Ægisthus near  
You talk thus to us, or is he gone from home?

ELECTRA. That is he. Never think, if he were by,  
I could roam forth; but he is abroad just now.

1 LADY. Then I might come with better confidence  
To speech of you, that being so.

ELECTRA. Oh, ask freely;  
He is not here. What do you want to know?

1 LADY. And so I will. What of your brother say you?  
I would fain know, will he come soon, or tarry?

ELECTRA. He says he will. He does not keep his word.

1 LADY. A man is backward, when on some great exploit.

ELECTRA. I was not backward, when I rescued him!

1 LADY. Take courage, he is of a worthy stock;  
He will not fail his friends.

ELECTRA. I trust so. Else  
I never should have been alive so long.

1 LADY. Hush, say no more just now; for I perceive  
Chrysothemis your sister, who was born  
Of the same mother and same sire as you,  
Come from the palace, carrying in her hands  
Oblations customary to the dead.

*Enter* CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Sister, what talk is this, you come and cry  
Aloud, abroad, before the outer gate,  
Nor will not learn, taught by long years, to cease  
Vainly indulging unavailing rage?

I for myself can say as much as this—

I chafe at those I live with, in such fashion  
As, if I could get power, I would make plain  
The sort of temper that I bear towards them;  
But in these dangers it seems good to sail  
Close-reefed, and not pretend to be at work,  
But effect nothing harmful; and I wish  
You too would do the like; and yet, the right  
Is not as I declare, but as you judge it;  
Still, if I am to live at liberty,

I must in all things heed my governors.

ELECTRA. Well, it is strange that you, being his child  
Who was your sire, should have regard for her,  
Your mother, and have quite forgotten him!

All this good counsel you bestow on me  
Is of her teaching; and of your own self  
You can say nothing. Therefore take your choice;  
Either to be of evil mind, or else

Well minded to forget those dear to you;  
 Who said but now, if you could get the power,  
 You would shew plain the hate you have for them;  
 And yet, while I am doing everything  
 To avenge our father, do not take your part,  
 And seek to turn me from it, who take mine!  
 Danger! Is there not cowardice as well?  
 Come, answer me, what should it profit me  
 To cease my mourning? Or else hear me speak;  
 Do I not live? unprosperously I know,  
 But well enough for me; to them, the while,  
 I am a torment, and so render honour  
 To him that's gone, if there be service there!  
 You—madam hatress—you pretend you hate,  
 But really take your father's murderers' side!  
 For my part, I will never bend to them;  
 Not though a man should come and offer me  
 These gauds of yours, in which you glory now!  
 Yours be the full-spread board, the cup o'erflowing;  
 For me—be it my only sustenance  
 Not to offend against my conscience. Thus,  
 I do not ask to share your dignities,  
 And were you well-advised, no more would you!  
 But now, though it be in your power to be called  
 Your father's child—the foremost of mankind,  
 Be called—your mother's! So you shall appear  
 In most men's eyes unmeritoriously,  
 False to your friends, and to your father's shade.  
 1 LADY. Now in Heaven's name, no chiding! There is good  
 In what you both have said, if you would learn  
 Something from her, and she, in turn, from you.  
 CHRYSOTHEMIS. Oh, I am quite accustomed to her talk;  
 Nor, ladies, had I ever said one word,  
 Had I not heard a very great mishap  
 Was coming on her, which will make her cease  
 From her long sorrowing.  
 ELECTRA. Come, your bug-bear, tell it!  
 If you can mention any greater grief  
 Than these I have, I will reply no more.  
 CHRYSOTHEMIS. Well, I will tell you everything I know.  
 They are going, if you will not cease this mourning,  
 To send you where you will not any more  
 See daylight, but sing sorrow underground,  
 Buried alive, out of this territory.  
 Wherefore take heed, or by and by, in trouble  
 Never blame me. Prudence is easy, now.



- ELECTRA. Ay? have they purposed to do so to me?
- CHRYSOthemis. Most surely, when Ægisthus shall come home.
- ELECTRA. Why as for that, let him come speedily!
- CHRYSOthemis. What was it that you prayed for, silly one?
- ELECTRA. For him to come; if he is that way minded.
- CHRYSOthemis. So you may get—what treatment? Are you mad?
- ELECTRA. So I may get—farthest away from you!
- CHRYSOthemis. And of life present have you no regard?
- ELECTRA. Living like mine is choice, to marvel at!
- CHRYSOthemis. It might be, had you sense to be discreet.
- ELECTRA. Do not instruct me to be treacherous.
- CHRYSOthemis. I do not; but to yield to those who govern.
- ELECTRA. Well, gloze it so; you do not speak my language.
- CHRYSOthemis. Yet it were well not to be ruined through folly.
- ELECTRA. Come ruin, if needful, in a father's quarrel!
- CHRYSOthemis. I am sure our father pardons us for this.
- ELECTRA. That is the speech a villain might approve.
- CHRYSOthemis. You will not hearken and agree with me?
- ELECTRA. I trust I am not yet so senseless. No!
- CHRYSOthemis. Then I will go on whither I was sent.
- ELECTRA. Where are you going? To whom bear you these offerings?
- CHRYSOthemis. My mother sends me, to strew my father's grave.
- ELECTRA. How say you? To the most detested foe—
- CHRYSOthemis. Yes—"whom she murdered!" That is what you mean?
- ELECTRA. By whom, of all friends, bidden? At whose desire?
- CHRYSOthemis. Through some nocturnal panic, to my thinking.
- ELECTRA. God of my fathers, only aid me now!
- CHRYSOthemis. Do you gain any courage from her scare?
- ELECTRA. Tell me about the dream, and I could say.
- CHRYSOthemis. Only I do not know it; except just  
In brief, the story.
- ELECTRA. Well, but tell me that;  
Brief words ere now have often led astray—  
And righted mortals.
- CHRYSOthemis. It is said she saw  
An apparition of your sire and mine  
Come back again to daylight; and he took  
The sceptre which he sometime bore himself,  
But now Ægisthus bears, and planted it  
Upon the hearth, and out of it a shoot  
Budded and grew, till all Mycenæ's land  
Was covered with its shadow. So I heard  
Related by a fellow who was by,  
While to the Sun-God she disclosed her dream.  
But more than this I know not; only that  
She sends me on account of this alarm.



Now I beseech you, by our country's Gods,  
 Listen to me, and be not ruined by folly;  
 For though you should repulse me, by and by  
 In trouble you will turn to me again.

ELECTRA. Nay but let nothing of your fardel, dear,  
 Light on the tomb! for it were shame—were sin  
 From an abominable spouse to bring  
 Lustrations near, or perform obsequies  
 To a sire's shade. Let the winds have them, rather!  
 Or hide them deep in dust, where none of them  
 Shall ever touch our father's resting-place;  
 Let them be kept, stored underground, for her  
 When she is dead! Why, if she were not grown  
 The most abandoned of all womankind,  
 She never would have dreamt of smothering,  
 With her unfriendly strewments him she murdered!  
 Why look you, think you the entombed dead  
 Will take these gifts in kindness, at her hands  
 Who slew him foully, like an enemy,  
 Lopped of the extremities, the stains of blood  
 Smeared off, for lustral washings, on his head!  
 Do you imagine what you bear can purge  
 Her from her murder? Never! Let it be!  
 Cut from your head the longest locks of hair—  
 And mine, unhappy—small the gift, indeed,  
 But what I have—and give it him, this hair  
 Untended, and my girdle, unadorned  
 With broiderings! Fall upon your knees, and pray him  
 In favour come and help us, from the earth,  
 Against our enemies; and that his boy  
 Orestes may set foot, before he die,  
 Superior, on the bodies of his foes,  
 That we may crown him afterward with hands  
 Larger in gift than we can proffer now!

Yea I believe, I do believe, that he  
 Had part in sending her this ugly dream;  
 But still, sister, do this, for your own good,  
 And mine, and his, the man of all mankind  
 Dearest, our sire, who in the grave lies dead.

1 LADY. The princess speaks religiously, my friend;  
 And you, if you are wise, will heed her.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Yes.  
 It stands to reason, not that two should quarrel  
 Over their duty, but be quick and do it.  
 Only while I essay this business, friends,  
 Do you keep secret, in the name of Heaven!

For if my mother hears it, to my cost,  
Methinks, I shall attempt this venture, yet.

[Exit CHRYSOTHEMIS.

1.

CHORUS. If I be seer  
Not wholly erring and unpolicied,  
Self-propheying Justice means to appear,  
Bringing large succour to the righteous side,  
And following on, my child, with no long waiting-tide.  
Courage springs up within me, as I hear  
The voice of dreams, breathing sweet music near;  
He who begat thee, the Hellenian King,  
Forgets not ever; nor that Ancient Thing,  
The two-edged brazen fang, by which he foully died.

2.

Lo, this is she,  
Erinys, hiding her dread ambushed bands,  
Sandalled with brass, with myriad feet and hands.  
Yea time hath been, when they who should not, plied  
A blood-stained spousal-work, unmeet for bed or bride.  
Whence it comes o'er me, I shall never see  
On doer and accomplice harmlessly  
This portent fall; and nothing future can  
By good or ill dream be revealed to man,  
If this night-vision speed not, landward, on the tide.

O chariot-race weary  
Of Pelops of old,  
How fateful, how dreary,  
Thou hast proved to this land!  
For since Myrtilus slumbered,  
From the chariot, all gold,  
Torn, silenced for ever,  
Flung far from the strand,  
From thenceforth never  
The weary disgrace  
Of troubles unnumbered  
Hath passed from the race.

*Enter CLYTÆMNESTRA, attended.*

CLYTÆMNESTRA. You gad abroad, then, masterless again,  
Ægisthus absent; who did hinder you  
From bringing scandal on your family  
By brawling at the doors! Now he is gone.

You pay no heed to me; though many a time,  
 In many people's ears, you have proclaimed—  
 I, without shame or warrant, violate  
 Your rights and honours! I meanwhile commit  
 No violence; I but repay with scorn  
 The scorn you heap on me. Your father, though—  
 This and no other—is your pretext still,  
 How by my hand he died! By mine; I know it;  
 There's no denial of the deed in me.  
 But Justice slew him; I was not alone;  
 And had you sense, you ought to take her side;  
 Since he, this father whom you still bewail,  
 Alone of all the Argives had the heart  
 To offer to the Gods your sister's life—  
 Whose pains in her begetting equalled not  
 My travail-pangs, who bare her! Be it so;  
 Now tell me for what cause, and for whose sake,  
 He offered her? For the Argives, will you say?  
 They had no right to kill a child of mine!  
 If for his brother Menelaus' sake  
 He slew my daughter, was not he to pay  
 Forfeit for that? Were there not children twain  
 Born to that father, who, had right been done,  
 Ought rather to have died, whose sire and dam  
 Themselves had caused that voyage? Had the Grave  
 Some fancy for my offspring, for its feast,  
 Rather than hers? Or had all natural love  
 Expired in that pernicious father's heart  
 For children born of me, but not for children  
 Of Menelaus? Was it not the act  
 Of a perverse insensate sire? I think it,  
 Though you deny; and so would that dead girl  
 Say, could she speak. For what my hands have done  
 I do not feel remorse; but if to you  
 I seem of evil mind, censure your folk,  
 When you yourself are just!

ELECTRA.

You cannot say

Now, that I crossed you and you answered me!  
 Yet if you gave me scope, I would speak fairly  
 For him that's dead, and for my sister too.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. I give it you! If you addressed me thus  
 Always, it would not chafe me so to hear.

ELECTRA. Then listen! You avow my father's death;  
 What could more ill become your mouth than this,  
 Whether he were unjustly slain or no?  
 But let me tell you that you slew him not

For Justice, but perverted by the lure  
Of a base wretch, who is your consort now.  
What! Question of the Huntress Artemis  
On whose account she held the various winds  
Spell-bound in Aulis! Rather, I will tell;  
For 'tis not given you to learn of her.  
My father once, as I have heard the tale,  
While sporting in a sacred wood of hers,  
Roused as he went a dappled antlered roe,  
And with some careless vaunt of slaughtering it  
Shoots at and hits it; wherefore Leto's maid,  
Wrathful at this, kept back the Achaian host,  
Till he should render up for sacrifice,  
In payment for the beast, his daughter dear—  
And therefore was she offered; since escape  
There was none other for the armament,  
Either toward Ilium, or backward home.  
Whence much enforced, and much resisting it,  
Not for the sake of Menelaus, he  
Unwillingly gave her to the knife at last.  
But what an if (for I will take your story)  
He did it through benevolence for him?  
Was it thereafter just that he should perish,  
And at your hand? Under what law? Beware  
You do not, while you set this law to others,  
Lay up repentance for yourself, and pain.  
If we begin to exchange life for life,  
You should die next, if you received your due.  
But look you do not proffer for excuse  
That which is not; for tell me, if you will,  
Why you are now doing things most execrable,  
Consorting with the branded murderer  
By whose connivance erst you slew my sire,  
And bearing children, to the extrusion of  
Your honest first-born, born in honesty?  
How should I pardon this? Or will you claim  
In this, too, to be trying to avenge  
Your daughter? It sounds vilely, if you do;  
For 'twere unseemly in a daughter's quarrel  
To couple with an enemy! Ay truly,  
It's an offence even to admonish you,  
Who let your tongue run freely, when you say  
That I speak evil of my mother! I  
A slave-mistress account you, over us,  
As much as mother; for a servile life  
Is that I lead, compassed with many griefs,

Wrought by yourself and by your paramour.  
 And poor Orestes is an exile, too,  
 Hardly delivered from your violence,  
 And living on in wretchedness—the same  
 You have so oft charged me with nurturing  
 To take revenge on you; and so I would—  
 Never doubt that—if I were strong enough.  
 Now, for that treason, publish me to all  
 Shameless—perverse—abusive—what you will;  
 And if I be an adept in the same,  
 I do bare justice to your blood in me!

1 LADY. I see her breathing fury! Right or wrong,  
 Now, 'tis all one, for any thought she gives it!

CLYTÆMNESTRA. What sort of thought, then, must I give to her,  
 Who in this fashion dares insult her mother,  
 And at her years? Do you suppose she means  
 To exceed all measure in her shamelessness?

ELECTRA. Now understand, I do feel shame at this,  
 Although to you I may not seem to feel it.

I do perceive that I am doing things  
 Unseasonable, and unbecoming me.

Only your acts and your hostility  
 Force me to this behaviour. Infamy  
 Is got by contact with the infamous.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Insolent creature! I, my words and acts,  
 Make you so loudly over-eloquent?

ELECTRA. It is your fault, not mine; you are the doer,  
 And deeds find names.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Now not by Artemis,  
 Who is my mistress, when Ægisthus comes  
 Shall you escape, for this audacity!

ELECTRA. See, now you fly into a frenzy! First  
 You let me speak my mind—then, you'll not listen!

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Will you not let me sacrifice, without  
 Words of ill omen, after suffering you  
 To say all that you can?

ELECTRA. Go, sacrifice!

I let you! Nay, I bid you! Censure not  
 My mouth again, for I shall say no more.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Take up the offerings, you that wait on me,  
 The fruits of earth, that unto this my Lord

I may prefer petitions for release  
 Out of my present terrors.—Hear thou now,  
 Protector Phœbus, my unuttered vow!  
 For what I say I say not among friends,  
 Nor is it meet to uncover all my ends



Here, in her presence, to the open sky,  
 Lest she with malice and loud clamorous cry  
 Scatter vain babblings to the city round;  
 But softly list, and soft my words shall sound.  
 The ambiguous visions, whose dim shadowing  
 Last night I witnessed, O Lycean King,  
 If they portended good, give them like close;  
 If evil, turn them backward on my foes.  
 And do not thou, if any would by stealth,  
 Let them disturb me from my present wealth;  
 Let me live on securely, as to-day,  
 Holding the Atridæ's palace, and their sway,  
 Abiding with the friends I bide withal  
 Now, in good case; and with my children, all  
 Through whom no bitter pang is made to strike  
 Their mother's heart, nor shudder of dislike.  
 Hear, great Apollo, what I pray for thus,  
 And, as we ask, in grace give all of us.  
 —The rest, I think, thou, being divine, perceiv'st,  
 Though I be silent; for it cannot be  
 But all is open to the sons of Jove.

*Enter* GUARDIAN.

GUARDIAN. Ladies, to whom I am a foreigner,  
 Pray how might I discover if this palace  
 Be that of King Ægisthus?

I LADY. Sir, it is;  
 Your guess is right.

GUARDIAN. And am I further right  
 In guessing that this lady is his wife?  
 She bears a queenly presence.

I LADY. Certainly:  
 You see her there before you.

GUARDIAN. Madam, hail!  
 I bring you pleasant tidings from a friend;  
 You, and Ægisthus also.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. They are welcome.  
 But I would hear first, who he was that sent you.

GUARDIAN. Phanoteus of Phocis, with a weighty charge.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Of what sort, stranger, say? for I am sure,  
 Being from a friend, that you will speak us friendly.

GUARDIAN. Briefly I speak. Orestes is no more.

ELECTRA. O I am lost, unhappy!

CLYTÆMNESTRA. What sir, what?  
 Never mind her!

GUARDIAN. I say as I have said.



Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA.

O me, I am undone!

Now I am nothing!

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Yea, see thou to that.

How came he by his death, sir? Tell me truly.

GUARDIAN. I will tell all; for to that end I came.

The man had gone to the great festival—

The glory of Hellas—for the Delphian games;

And when he heard the shouting of the crier

Calling the foot-race, which is first adjudged,

He entered for it, comely to behold,

The worship of the eyes of all men there;

And having reached the limit of the course

Whence they were started, he came out of it

With the all-honoured prize of victory.

To say but little out of much I might,

I never saw before the acts and prowess

Of such a man as he; but take one statement;

In every heat for which the judges set

The customary courses, out and home,

He brought off all the honours of the day,

And was congratulated, and proclaimed

“An Argive, named Orestes”—and “the son

Of Agamemnon,” him who mustered once

The illustrious host of Hellas. So far well.

But if some Deity is bent on harm,

It is not even a strong man can escape.

For he, another day at sunrise, when

Owners of horses met to try their speed,

With many other charioteers, went in.

One was Achaian, one from Sparta, two

Libyans, skilled masters of the yoke and car;

He among these, with mares of Thessaly,

Came fifth; the sixth was from Ætolia,

With bright bay colts; the seventh Magnesian;

The eighth of Ænian birth, his horses white;

The ninth from Athens the divinely builded;

Last, a Bœotian's car made up the ten.

These, stationed where the judges of the course

Cast each his lot, and ranked his driving-board,

Forth started at the brazen bugle's note,

And cheering to their horses all at once

Shook the grasped reins; then the whole course was filled

With rattle of the chariot metal-work;

The dust rose high; crowded together, all

Spared not the goad—so might some one of them  
Fore-reach on snorting steed and axle-tree;  
While evermore alike on back and wheel,  
Foaming and quick, the coursers' panting came.  
But he kept close under the endmost mark,  
Sweeping his axle round continuously,  
And, giving rein to the right-handmost steed,  
Pulled back the inner goer. And at first  
The driving-boards all held themselves upright;  
But afterwards the Ænian's hard-mouthed colts  
Bolt violently; and coming from the turn,  
After the sixth, just in the seventh round,  
Dash all their fronts against the Barca car;  
Then, in an instant, from one accident,  
Car upon car began to crash and fall,  
And the whole plain of Crisa became filled  
With wreck of steeds and tackling. At the sight  
That crafty driver, he from Athens, draws  
Out of the way, and slackens, passing by  
The surge of chariots eddying in the midst.  
Last came Orestes, trusting to the close,  
Keeping his fillies back; but seeing him  
Left in alone, he launches a shrill whoop  
Through his fleet coursers' ears, and races him,  
And yoke and yoke the couple drove along,  
Now one and now the other shewing head  
Out in the front, over their carriages.  
Well, all his rounds, poor fellow, till the last,  
He stood up straight, and kept his chariot straight,  
And drove straight through; then, slackening the left rein  
As his horse turns, he struck unwittingly  
The corner of the mark, and snapped the nave  
Short from the axle, and slipped instantly  
Over the rail, and in the cloven reins  
Was tangled; as upon the plain he fell,  
His steeds into the middle of the course  
Ran all astray. Then the whole host, that saw him  
Precipitated from the driving-board,  
Lifted their voices to bewail the youth  
Who did such feats, and met with such hard fate,  
Now dashed upon the ground, now seen with limbs  
All upward flung to heaven; till chariot-men  
Hardly restrained the steeds in their career,  
And loosed him, bathed in blood, so that no friend,  
Seeing the poor body, could have known 'twas he.

Then certain Phocians, ordered for the task,  
 Straightway consumed it on a funeral pile,  
 And hither in a little urn they bring  
 That mighty stature, in poor embers now,  
 To win a tomb in his own fathers' land.  
 Such is my tale; right piteous in the telling;  
 But in the sight of us, who witnessed it,  
 The saddest thing of all I ever saw.

1 LADY. Alack, the lineage of our lords of old  
 Is all, too plainly, ruined from the root.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. O God, this fortune—shall I call it fair,  
 Or black, though profitable? yet is it hard  
 That I should save my own life, through misfortunes  
 Which are my own!

GUARDIAN. Why thus regretful, lady,  
 At what I have just told you?

CLYTÆMNESTRA. It is strange—  
 This motherhood; for sons of one's own bearing,  
 However ill entreated at their hands,  
 One cannot muster hatred.

GUARDIAN. I am come,  
 It seems, in vain.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Nay indeed, not in vain.  
 Why should you say in vain? if you are come  
 With a sure token that the man is dead,  
 Who was indeed the offspring of my being,  
 But from this bosom and maternal care  
 Revolted, and became as one estranged,  
 An exile; never, from the day he left  
 This country, saw me more; but, laying to me  
 His father's death, was ever threatening me,  
 So that sweet sleep by neither night nor day  
 Would cover me, but the impending hour  
 Held me continually in fear of death;  
 While now, since I am this day freed from terror  
 Of him, and of her too—for she dwelt with me  
 A far worse canker, ever draining deep  
 My very life-blood—now, for all her menaces,  
 I shall dwell tranquil!

ELECTRA. O me miserable!

Why now, Orestes, there is room enough  
 To groan for thy misfortune, when, being thus,  
 Thou art scorned by this thy mother! Is it well?

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Not thou—but he being as he is, is well.

ELECTRA. Hear, Nemesis of him who is no more!

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Those she should hear Nemesis did hear, and well

Did she perform!

LECTRA. Triumph! you are happy now.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. You and Orestes cannot hinder me.

LECTRA. 'Tis we are hindered; far from hindering you.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. I were beholden to your coming, friend,  
if you could hinder her from her loud clamour.

GUARDIAN. Well then, I will be going—if all is well.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. Nay, for it were unworthy both of me

and of the friend who sent you, did you meet

such entertainment. Please you enter in?

Leave her alone, to sorrow out of doors

for her dear friends' misfortunes, and her own.

[*Exeunt CLYTÆMNESTRA and GUARDIAN.*]

LECTRA. Seems it to you as if, in grief and pain,

he was lamenting, weeping sore—the wretch!

Over her son, thus lost? She is gone smiling!

O me unhappy! Orestes, O my darling,

How has thy death undone me! Parting thus,

Thou tearest all the hopes out of my heart—

All I had left—that thou would'st come, some day,

Living, avenger of thy father's death,

and of my wrongs. Now, whither should I turn?

I am alone; I have no father; now

have not thee. Must I be slave once more

among the most detested of mankind,

My father's murderers? Is it well with me?

Nay, for the future never more at all

shall one roof hold us; rather, on this door-stone, friendless

will sink down and wear away and die!

For this if any of the tribe within

is angered, let him kill me; death were welcome;

Life is but pain, and I am sick of it.

I. 1.

LADY. Where be Jove's thunders, where the flaming Day,

if, seeing these things, they hide them, and are still?

LECTRA. Ah, welaway!

LADY. My child, why weepest thou?

LECTRA. Fie then—

LADY. Speak gently.

LECTRA. Thou wilt slay me.

LADY. How?

LECTRA. Yea, in my wasting, thou wilt trample more

Upon me, if thou wilt suggest a hope

For those who manifestly are dead and gone.

## I. 2.

I LADY. I know that women's gold-bound toils ensnared  
The king Amphiaraus; and now beneath—  
ELECTRA. Ah well a day!

I LADY. He reigns, with all his powers.

ELECTRA. Ah, woe!

I LADY. Woe, for the murderess—

ELECTRA. Slain?

I LADY. Ay, slain.

ELECTRA. I know it, I know it; a champion was revealed  
For him, in trouble; none is left, for me;  
He who yet was is taken from me, and gone.

## II. 1.

I LADY. Thou art meet for pity; piteous is thy lot.

ELECTRA. That know I well, too well; my life is full  
With month on month, with surge on surge of woes,  
Hateful and fearful.

I LADY. All thy groans we know.

ELECTRA. Therefore no more dissuade me, since not one—

I LADY. How say'st thou?

ELECTRA. Is left of all my hopes of aid,  
From him, the heir, born of one birth with me.

## II. 2.

I LADY. All have their fate.

ELECTRA. Meet all such fate as his,  
Dragged in a cleft of the reins, poor hapless one,  
Among fleet emulous hoofs?

I LADY. Strange, the mishap!

ELECTRA. How otherwise, when without care of mine,  
A stranger—

I LADY. Out, alas!

ELECTRA. He passed away,  
Meeting no burial, no lament, from me.

*Enter* CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. My dearest, I am driven, for delight,  
To throw decorum to the winds, and run!  
For I bring pleasure, and an end of ills  
You suffered from before, and sorrowed for.

ELECTRA. Whence would you fetch assistance for my woes,  
Whereof all healing is impossible?

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Orestes is at hand! I tell you so!

He's here, in sight, plainly as you see me!

ELECTRA. Fie, are you frantic, wretch, and do you jest  
At your own sorrows, and at mine?

CHRYSOthemis. Not I,

By the house-altar! I do not say this  
For wantonness; but he is come, indeed!

ELECTRA. O wretched that I am! and from whose mouth  
Did you receive this tale, that you believe  
So over fondly?

CHRYSOthemis. It is proved to me  
By my own eyes, none other; for I see  
Clear evidence.

ELECTRA. See proof? O wretch, what proof?  
What did you see, to inflame you all at once  
With this mad fever?

CHRYSOthemis. Listen, in Heaven's name,  
That you may learn; and call me, afterwards,  
Crazed, if you like, or sober.

ELECTRA. Say your say,  
If it affords you any pleasure.

CHRYSOthemis. I  
Am telling you exactly what I saw.  
As I approached our sire's ancestral grave,  
I observed streams upon the pillar's top  
Of milk fresh-running, and the sepulchre  
Circled with garlands of all flowers in bloom.  
I was surprised to see it, and looked round,  
To see that no one near laid hand on me.  
But when I found all quiet about the place,  
I crept up to the tombstone, and perceived,  
Upon the very corner of the pile,  
A severed ringlet of a young man's hair.  
No sooner did I see it, than there darts  
Into my heart an image—ah! well known,  
This that I was beholding was the token  
Of my most dear Orestes! No light word  
I uttered; but I took it in my hands,  
And my eyes filled with tears at once, for joy.  
And well I know, and well I knew it then,  
How from no other came that ornament.  
For whose work should it be, save yours or mine?  
And I at least, I am certain, did it not,  
Nor yet did you; how could you? when you know  
You cannot even with impunity  
Go out of doors to worship at a shrine;  
Nor can it be our mother who would care



To do it, or have done it unperceived.  
 No, 'twas Orestes made those offerings.  
 But O dear heart, take courage! The same Power  
 Succours not always the same side alike;  
 And on us twain it has frowned hitherto;  
 But none the less, this morning shall be fraught  
 With many things for good.

ELECTRA. Alack the while!

How I pity you for your folly!

CHRYSTHEMIS. But what is it?

Do I not speak to please you now?

ELECTRA. You know not

Whither you are borne—how far you are astray!

CHRYSTHEMIS. But how can I not know, what I saw plainly?

ELECTRA. O wretched girl, he's dead! his saving us  
 Is done and ended; never look to him!

CHRYSTHEMIS. Alas for pity! Who was it told you so?

ELECTRA. One that was present with him, when he perished.

CHRYSTHEMIS. 'Tis very strange. Where is he?

ELECTRA. In the house;

Welcome, not odious, in our mother's eyes.

CHRYSTHEMIS. Alas for pity! But from whom, then, came  
 All those oblations to our father's grave?

ELECTRA. I think most likely some one put them there  
 In memory of Orestes, who was dead.

CHRYSTHEMIS. O miserable! and I was hastening hither,  
 Joyful to have such tidings, unaware

What mischief was upon us! Now, arrived,  
 I find the old sorrows still, with others new:

ELECTRA. 'Tis so indeed; but if you list to me,  
 You can relieve the burden of the woe  
 Weighing on us now.

CHRYSTHEMIS. What, can I raise the dead?

ELECTRA. That is not what I said; I am not so senseless!

CHRYSTHEMIS. What do you bid me, that is in my power?

ELECTRA. Dare to do that which I shall urge on you!

CHRYSTHEMIS. If it will aid us, I shall not refuse.

ELECTRA. Look, without effort nothing thrives.

CHRYSTHEMIS. I know it.

All I have strength for I will help to bear.

ELECTRA. Hear, then, the course I am resolved upon.

Friends to stand by us even you must know  
 That none are left us; but the Grave has taken  
 And reft them; and we two remain alone.

I, while I heard my brother was alive  
 And well, had hopes that he would come, one day,

To the requiting of his father's death;  
 But since he is no more, to you I look  
 Not to refuse, with me, your sister here,  
 To slay the author of that father's murder,  
 Ægisthus; (we need have no secrets, now.)  
 For whither—to what still surviving hope  
 Do you yet look, and suffer patiently?  
 Who for the loss of your ancestral wealth  
 Have cause for grieving, and have cause for pain  
 At all the time that passes over you,  
 Growing so old, a maiden and unwed.  
 And these delights no longer hope to gain  
 At any time; Ægisthus is too prudent  
 To suffer that your progeny or mine  
 Should see the light, to his own clear undoing!  
 While, if you will be guided by my counsels,  
 First, you shall have the praise of piety  
 From your dead sire and brother in the grave,  
 Next, shall be called hereafter, as at first,  
 Free, and obtain a marriage worthy of you;  
 For all men pay regard to honesty.  
 And as for glory—see you not what glory  
 You will confer upon yourself and me,  
 If you should heed me? For what citizen  
 Or stranger, who beholds us, will not greet  
 Our passing steps with praises such as these:  
 "Friends, look at those two sisters, who redeemed  
 Their fathers' house; who, prodigal of life,  
 Were ministers of slaughter to their foes  
 Who prospered well before; to them be worship,  
 To them the love of all men; at high feasts,  
 In general concourse, for their fortitude,  
 That pair let all men honour." Of us two  
 Such are the things that every man will say,  
 So that our glory shall not cease from us,  
 Living or dead. O, be persuaded, dear!  
 Succour your father's, aid your brother's cause,  
 Liberate me from evils, and yourself,  
 Remembering this, that a dishonoured life  
 Is shame to those who have been born in honour.  
 I LADY. In work like this forethought is serviceable  
 Both to the speaker and the listener.  
 CHRYSOTHEMIS. And if she were not mentally perverse,  
 She would have had some thought of prudence, ladies,  
 Before she ever spake—which now she has not.  
 Why, in what prospect do you arm yourself

With such a valour, and call me to aid?  
 Can you not see, you are not man, but woman?  
 Your hand is weaker than your enemies'.  
 Heaven sends good fortune daily upon them,  
 Which runs from us, and comes to nothingness.  
 Who, then, that schemed the death of one so mighty,  
 Could 'scape uninjured by calamity?

Look that we do not happen on worse ills,  
 Ill as we fare, if some one hears these sayings.  
 Death, with disgrace, though we obtain some credit,  
 Is no advantage and no help to us;  
 For death is not the worst; rather, in vain  
 To wish for death, and not to compass it.  
 But I beseech you, ere we are destroyed  
 With a complete destruction utterly,  
 Ere you abolish our whole family,  
 Set bounds on passion! What you said just now  
 I will keep close, unspoken, unensued;  
 Only be wise enough to yield at length  
 To stronger power, having yourself no strength.

1 LADY. Let her persuade you; there is no good thing  
 Better than foresight and sobriety.

ELECTRA. You have said nought I did not look for. Well  
 I knew, you would reject my instances.

Yes, I must do it by myself alone;

At least, without one blow, we will not leave it.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Ah, would you had been so minded, when our sire  
 Was murdered! Then you would have ended all!

ELECTRA. I was, in temper; I lacked wisdom then.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Try and remain as wise for evermore!

ELECTRA. Now that you preach, I know you will not help me!

CHRYSOTHEMIS. And any man would come to harm who did!

ELECTRA. I envy you your prudence; for your cowardice,  
 I hate you!

CHRYSOTHEMIS. I will bear it, when you praise.

ELECTRA. Only you never will get praise of me!

CHRYSOTHEMIS. It will be long, yet, before that is settled.

ELECTRA. There is no service in you; get you gone.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. There is! With you there is no towardness.

ELECTRA. Go to your mother; tell it all to her.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Nay, I am not so much your enemy.

ELECTRA. Do not forget, though, to what shame you drag me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. Shame not at all; but forethought for your good.

ELECTRA. So I must follow what you think is just?

CHRYSOTHEMIS. When you are prudent, you shall guide us both.

ELECTRA. Pity that you should speak so well, and miss it!

CHRYSOTHEMIS. You have named right the fault on your own side.

ELECTRA. How can that be? Do you deny the justice  
Of what I say?

CHRYSTHEMIS. Justice sometimes brings damage.

ELECTRA. Under those laws I do not choose to live.

CHRYSTHEMIS. Well, you will find me right, if you will do it.

ELECTRA. Ay and I will! You cannot frighten me.

CHRYSTHEMIS. Is't really so? Will you not change your mind?

ELECTRA. Nothing's more odious than an evil mind.

CHRYSTHEMIS. You seem to care for nothing I can say.

ELECTRA. I have resolved to do it of old time,  
Not newly.

CHRYSTHEMIS. I am going. Neither you  
Deign to approve my words, nor I your ways.

ELECTRA. Go in, then! I shall never follow you;

Not though you come to wish it earnestly;

There were small sense in running after—folly!

CHRYSTHEMIS. And if you think that reason is with you,

So reason still! for, when your footsteps light

In evil ways, then you will find me right. [Exit CHRYSTHEMIS.]

#### I. 1.

CHORUS. We that regard  
The excellent wisdom of the birds of air,  
Who for the nurture care  
Of those they spring from—those who gave them food,  
Why is it hard  
For us, like them, to render good for good?  
But, by the thunderbolt of sovereign Jove,  
And Themis, throned above,  
We 'scape not long!  
Thou, who to mortals in the realms of death  
Passest through earth, send forth thy voice, O Fame,  
With piteous cry, to Atreus' sons beneath,  
Bearing thy tale of shame  
Unmeet for song

#### I. 2.

How first of all  
Corruption dwells within their palace hall,  
And, with their children, strife;  
The dissonant watchword harmonized no more  
Now, as before,  
By sweet endearments of their household life.  
Electra, left alone, by rude waves tossed,  
Mourns for her father lost

With ceaseless wail,  
 Even as the ever-sorrowing nightingale,  
 Careless for death, so she might end them too,  
 The accursed pair—yea, ready for the gloom;  
 What woman lives as true  
 This side the tomb?

## II. 1.

For none among the great  
 Would court oblivion,  
 Darkening his honour by a life of pain,  
 As thou, my child, hast done,  
 Choosing to share a fate  
 Full of all tears, not caring to obtain  
 At once, in the same breath, the twofold prize  
 Of daughter perfect, and of maiden wise.

## II. 2.

Live thou—in wealth and force  
 Above thy foes as far  
 As now thou dwellest underneath their might!  
 For under no good star  
 Have I beheld the course  
 Lying, of thy life; yet in the paths of Right  
 Most sovereign—thou, I say, in these hast trod  
 The foremost, through thy piety to God.

*Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, with an urn.*

ORESTES. Were we told right, and are we tending right,  
 As we desire, fair ladies?

I LADY. And what seek you?  
 What are you here for?

ORESTES. I was asking where  
 Ægisthus lodged.

I LADY. Then you are well arrived,  
 And your informant blameless.

ORESTES. Which of you  
 Would kindly carry word to those within  
 Of the long-looked-for presence of us twain?

I LADY. If the most near ought to announce it, she will.

ORESTES. Lady, go in and tell them certain Phocians  
 Seek for Ægisthus.

ELECTRA. O me miserable!  
 Are you not bringing tokens to confirm  
 The tale we heard?

ORESTES. I do not know your story;  
But my old master, Strophius, gave me charge  
To tell about Orestes.

ELECTRA. O sir, what?  
How terror creeps upon me!

ORESTES. We bring home  
Poor relics of him, in a narrow urn,  
Dead, as you see.

ELECTRA. Unhappy that I am!  
Here is the thing already evident.

I see your burden, I suppose, at hand.

ORESTES. If you are grieving for Orestes' ills,  
Know, that this vessel holds the dust of him.

ELECTRA. O sir, in Heaven's name give it—if this urn  
Hides him indeed—into my hands, to hold,  
That I may weep and mourn to the uttermost  
For my own self, and my whole race, at once,  
Over these ashes!

ORESTES. Bring it here, and give her,  
Whoever she may be; for I am sure  
She does not ask it out of enmity,  
But as some friend, or blood-relation born.

ELECTRA. Ah thou memorial of my best-beloved,  
All that is left me of Orestes, how

Do I receive thee back—not as I hoped,  
When I first sped thee on thy way! For now  
I bear thee in my hands, and thou art nothing;  
But O my child, I sent thee forth from home  
Glorious with life! Would that I first had died,  
Before I sent thee to a foreign land,  
Stolen by these hands and out of slaughter saved;  
So had that day beheld thee lying dead,  
Partaking with me in thy father's grave.

But now thou hast perished—perished miserably,  
An exile in a strange land, far from home,  
Far from thy sister; nor with loving hands  
Bathed I thy body, and laid it out—woe's me!  
Nor, as was fitting, from the blazing pyre  
Took up the poor remains. But cared for—ah,  
By unfamiliar hands thou art come hither,  
A little burden, in a little urn.

Ah me unhappy for my ancient care  
Made fruitless, for the pleasing toil I spent,  
Often, on thee! for not at any time  
Wert thou thy mother's darling, more than mine;  
I was thy nurse; no houselings fostered thee;



I was thy "sister," ever, too, by name.  
 But now all this has vanished in a day,  
 Even with thy death. For thou hast gathered all  
 Together, like a whirlwind, and art gone;  
 My father is no more; I too am dead  
 In thee; thyself art dead, and gone from me;  
 And our foes laugh; and that disnatured mother,  
 Of whom thou hast often sent word privily  
 Thou would'st thyself appear to punish her,  
 Raves with delight! This the ill Destiny  
 Of thee and me wrested away; who sent thee  
 On to me thus—not the dear form I loved,  
 But embers, and an unavailing shade.  
 —Woe's me! O piteous sight! Alas, alas,  
 A terrible journey hast thou gone, my dear;  
 Woe's me! and without thee I am undone;  
 I am undone without thee, O my brother!  
 Receive me then into this house of thine,  
 Nought unto nought, to dwell with thee below  
 For evermore. For when thou wast on earth,  
 All that I had on earth I shared with thee;  
 And—for I see no grieving in the dead—  
 I would die now, so I might share thy tomb.  
 I LADY. Your sire, Electra, was a mortal man;  
 So was Orestes; wherefore do not grieve  
 Beyond all bounds; we all owe Heaven a death.  
 ORESTES. O Heavens, what shall I say? whither shall I turn  
 For lack of words? for I have lost the power  
 Of speech!  
 ELECTRA. What ails you? Wherefore do you say it?  
 ORESTES. Is this the illustrious Electra—you?  
 ELECTRA. That is it, and in case right miserable.  
 ORESTES. Alack therefore, for this thy wretched lot!  
 ELECTRA. Sir, you are not lamenting thus for me?  
 ORESTES. O beauty foully—impiously destroyed!  
 ELECTRA. The wretch you speak of is no other, sir,  
 Than I.  
 ORESTES. Alas for thy estate, unwed,  
 Unfortunate!  
 ELECTRA. Why do you groan, sir, thus,  
 Gazing on me!  
 ORESTES. How did I nothing know  
 Of my own woes!  
 ELECTRA. By what, that has been said,  
 Did you discover that?

- ORESTES. By seeing you,  
Preëminent in multitude of griefs.
- ELECTRA. And yet you see but little of my woes.
- ORESTES. How could there be worse things than these to see?
- ELECTRA. That I am sorted with the murderers.
- ORESTES. Whose murderers? Whence is this hint of crime?
- ELECTRA. My father's. Next, I am perforce their slave.
- ORESTES. Who is it bends you to this exigence?
- ELECTRA. My mother—in name—but nothing mother-like.
- ORESTES. And how? by force, or wearing injury?
- ELECTRA. By force, by wearing, and all ills that be.
- ORESTES. And was none by to help or hinder it?
- ELECTRA. No; him I had you have brought here in ashes.
- ORESTES. Ill-fated one, how has the sight of you  
Moved my compassion!
- ELECTRA. Know, you are the first  
Who ever had compassion upon me.
- ORESTES. Because I am the first to come, who feel  
With your misfortunes.
- ELECTRA. It can never be  
You are some kinsman, who have come—whence could you?
- ORESTES. If these are friends about us, I will tell.
- ELECTRA. Yes, they are friends; you parley to safe ears.
- ORESTES. Put down this vessel, now, and learn the whole.
- ELECTRA. Ah sir, for Heaven's sake urge not this on me!
- ORESTES. Do as I tell you, and you shall not err.
- ELECTRA. Now, I adjure you, do not take away  
My greatest treasure!
- ORESTES. I will not let you hold it.
- ELECTRA. O my Orestes! Woe is me for thee,  
If I must be deprived of burying thee!
- ORESTES. Do not speak rashly. You do wrong to mourn.
- ELECTRA. How wrong, in mourning for my brother dead?
- ORESTES. It is not meet that you should call him so.
- ELECTRA. Am I then so disdained of him that's dead?
- ORESTES. Disdained of none; but you have no part here.
- ELECTRA. Not when I bear Orestes' ashes?
- ORESTES. Not
- Orestes' ashes; only his in feigning.
- ELECTRA. Then where is that poor body's sepulchre?
- ORESTES. No where. The living have no sepulchre!
- ELECTRA. What say you, fellow?
- ORESTES. What I say is true.
- ELECTRA. Is he alive?
- ORESTES. Yes, unless I am dead!

ELECTRA. What, are you he?

ORESTES. See here, my father's seal!

Look at it well, and learn if I speak truly.

ELECTRA. O happy day!

ORESTES. Most happy; even so.

ELECTRA. O art thou come, dear voice?

ORESTES. No more to sound

From alien lips.

ELECTRA. What, have I got you?

ORESTES. Yes,

For you to keep, in future, evermore.

ELECTRA. O dearest friends! O ladies, neighbours! Look,

Here is Orestes, only dead in craft,

And by that craft alive and safe at home!

1 LADY. Daughter, we see it; and the tears of joy

Steal from our eyes, at what has come to pass.

ELECTRA. O son, dear seed

Of one most dear to me!

And art thou come indeed?

Thou hast found—hast come, hast seen those thou didst seek to see!

ORESTES. Yes, I am here; but hush, keep silence.

ELECTRA. Why?

ORESTES. Best to keep close, lest some one hear indoors.

ELECTRA. Nay but, by the ever-virgin Artemis,

I never think to quail again at this,

The cumbering plague of numbers feminine,

That ever swarm within!

ORESTES. O but remember that in women too

There lives a spirit of war; and thou hast proved it.

ELECTRA. Ah well a day!

Thou makest the memory plain—

That will not pass away—

That cannot be forgotten—of my pain.

ORESTES. Sister, I know it; but, when occasion speaks,

Then is it we should call to mind these doings.

ELECTRA. All day, all night,

Were not too much for me

To speak of them aright;

Now that my lips at last are set at liberty.

ORESTES. I say not nay; therefore take heed.

ELECTRA. Of what?

ORESTES. Now 'tis no time for talk, be sparing of it.

ELECTRA. Who, after thy appearing, would exchange

Language for silence? That were dearly bought,

Now I have found thee, in a manner strange

Beyond all hope or thought!

ORESTES. You saw me then, when the Gods urged my coming.

ELECTRA. O grace, far more

Than that thou first didst tell!

If to thy kinsmen's door

God sent thee safe, that count I miracle!

ORESTES. I am unwilling to restrain your joy,

But fear you are too much overcome with rapture.

ELECTRA. Oh, if after years of waiting

I have found thee condescending

By a way full fraught with blessing

Here before me to appear,

Seeing me so full of troubles,

Spare, O spare—

ORESTES. . . . . What should I spare thee?

ELECTRA. Be not thou so much my wronger

As to make me lose the pleasure

Of thy presence!

ORESTES. . . . . Nay,

I should be very wroth with other men

If I beheld them—

ELECTRA. . . . . Do you say so?

ORESTES. . . . . How

Could I forbear?

ELECTRA. Hark, the voice, women dear,

I had never hoped to hear!

Listening, how could I have heard,

And held my peace, without one word,

Sorrowing? But I have thee, now!

With most sweet face there standest thou,

Face, that even in misery

Could not pass away from me.

ORESTES. Pass what need not be said; spare me the telling

How base our mother; how Ægisthus drains

The family substance, giving largess here,

There scattering without purpose; for the tale

Would keep you from the occasion time has given.

But what will fit the present urgency,

Where, either visible or from ambushment,

We may give pause in this day's enterprise

To foes who mock, explain; be careful, too,

That as we enter at the palace door

Your mother do not spy your secret out

In your glad aspect; but be sighing, still,

As at that fiction of calamity;

For when we are successful, we shall be

Free to rejoice and laugh ungrudgingly.

ELECTRA. Well, brother, as it pleases you in this;  
 So too shall be my pleasure; for from you  
 I have derived the blessings I enjoy—  
 Blessings not mine; and I could never bear,  
 By causing you annoy, ever so brief,  
 To reap great gain myself; for ill should I  
 So minister to the Providence at hand.  
 You know, no doubt, all that is passing here;  
 You heard Ægisthus was away from home,  
 My mother in the palace; and for her,  
 Fear not she will perceive my countenance  
 Radiant with smiles; for my long-standing hate  
 Is well worn in; and, having seen thy face,  
 I shall not leave off weeping now, for joy.  
 How should I leave it? who in this day's work  
 Saw thee first dead, then living! Yea, thou hast wrought  
 Very strangely with me; so that if my sire  
 Were to come here in life, I should not now  
 Deem it a marvel, but believe I saw him.  
 Since then by such a road thou art come hither,  
 Lead on, as thou art minded; for alone  
 One of two things I had not failed to achieve—  
 Bravely to right myself, or bravely perish.

1 LADY. Peace, I advise you; for of those within  
 I hear one coming outward.

ELECTRA. Enter, sirs;  
 The rather that you bring—what none would drive  
 Far from their doors—or willingly receive!

*Enter* GUARDIAN.

GUARDIAN. O most unwise and impotent of mind,  
 Have you no longer any care to live,  
 Or is no natural prudence bred in you,  
 When in the very midst of ills most great,  
 Not on their verge, you stand, and do not see it?  
 If I had not been keeping, all along,  
 Watch at the door-posts, all your business here  
 Would have forestalled your presence in the house;  
 But as it is, I took good heed of that.  
 Now make an end of your long conference,  
 And this insatiate crying out for joy,  
 And pass within; for in such work as this  
 Delay is loss, and it is time to finish.

ORESTES. What will the issue be, if I go in?

GUARDIAN. All's well so far, that you are quite unknown.

ORESTES. You told them, I suppose, that I was dead?

GUARDIAN. You'd think you were in Hades, though alive,  
To hear them talk!

ORESTES. Do they rejoice at that?  
What are they saying?

GUARDIAN. When the time is ripe  
I will inform you; but as things are now,  
All they are doing, however ill, goes well.

ELECTRA. Brother, who is this man? For Heaven's sake, tell me!

ORESTES. Do you not know him?

ELECTRA. I cannot even guess.

ORESTES. Not him, to whom you once delivered me?

ELECTRA. What man? what do you mean?

ORESTES. Him, in whose hands  
I was made off with to the Phocians' land  
By your providing?

ELECTRA. What, is this the man  
Whom only I found faithful out of many  
When our sire perished?

ORESTES. Once for all, 'tis he.

ELECTRA. O happy day! O only saviour  
Of Agamemnon's house! How art thou come hither!  
Art thou the man who out of many woes  
Didst save both him and me? O hands most dear!  
O feet, most grateful for your ministry!  
How could'st thou so long hide thee in my presence,  
And kill me with false words, and shew me not,  
Knowing all the while, the sweet reality?

O welcome, father! in thee I seem to see  
A father! Welcome! Surely of all men thee  
Within one day I have hated most—and love!

GUARDIAN. Enough, I say; the story of all since then  
Many revolving nights and days as many  
Shall make to pass before Electra's eyes.—  
But now I warn you both, you who stand by,  
This is the time to act; now Clytæmnestra

Is left alone; now no one of the men  
Is within doors; but if you will delay,  
Consider, you will have to cope with these,  
And more besides, and of more wit, than they.

ORESTES. This need not be a matter to us now  
For any long discoursing, Pylades!  
Rather, first worshipping the ancestral shrines  
Of all the Gods who keep this vestibule,  
As quickly as we may, let us pass in.

[*Exeunt ORESTES, PYLADES and GUARDIAN.*]

ELECTRA. O King Apollo, hear them graciously,



And me as well; me, who have come to thee  
 Right often, with persistent hand, that gave  
 Of all I had; so now with all I have,  
 Apollo, King Lycean, I implore,  
 I supplicate, I pray thee—go before,  
 And help us to our ends; and make mankind confess  
 How the Gods quit them, for their wickedness!

[Retire

## I.

CHORUS. Behold where Ares, breathing forth the breath  
 Of strife and carnage, paces—paces on.  
 The inevitable hounds of death,  
 Hunters upon the track of guilt, are gone.  
 They stand the roof beneath;  
 And now not long the vision of my prayer  
 Shall tarry, floating in the fields of air.

## 2.

For now within these walls, with stealthy pace,  
 The aider of the kingdoms of the dead  
 To his ancestral dwelling-place,  
 Bearing keen slaughter in his hands, is led.  
 Hermes, of Maia's race,  
 Hiding his toils in darkness, leads the way  
 Straight to the goal, and makes no more delay.

ELECTRA (*advancing*). O dearest women, 'tis the moment, now,  
 For them to do the deed; but hush, keep still.

I LADY. How then? What are they doing?

ELECTRA. She is dressing  
 The urn for burial; and the Pair stand by.

I LADY. And what did you rush out for?

ELECTRA. To take care  
 Ægisthus come not in without our knowing.

CLYTÆMNESTRA (*within*). Woe's me! Alack, the house—  
 Empty of friends, and filled with murderers!

ELECTRA. A cry within! O friends, do not you hear it?

I LADY. I heard, unhappy, sounds I might not hear;  
 And I am chill with horror.

CLYTÆMNESTRA (*within*). Woe is me!  
 Ægisthus, O where are you?

I LADY. Hark again,  
 Some one is shrieking loud.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. (*within*). O child, my child,  
 Have mercy on your mother!

They say have brought us tidings that Orestes

Has lost his life, by shipwreck of his team?  
 You there, my question is of you, yes, you  
 That used before to be so malapert;  
 For it concerns you most, I think, to know,  
 And more than all, it is for you to say.  
 ELECTRA. I know. How could I help it? Otherwise  
 I should be ignorant of calamity  
 Nearest to me—of mine.

ÆGISTHUS. And where may be  
 The strangers? tell me, pray.

ELECTRA. They are within.  
 They—fell on a kind hostess!

ÆGISTHUS. Did they say  
 That he is dead in very earnest?

ELECTRA. Nay,  
 They brought and shewed it us—no merely told us.

ÆGISTHUS. Is it hard by, that I may see, and know?

ELECTRA. You may, indeed—a very sorry sight.

ÆGISTHUS. Your words have pleased me much; which is not usual.

ELECTRA. If they can give you pleasure, pray be pleased.

ÆGISTHUS. Now hold your peace, and open wide the gates,  
 For Myceneans, Argives—all to see,  
 So that, if any of them heretofore

Were buoyed by empty hopes of such an one,  
 Seeing him now dead, they may accept my curb,  
 And, having me for chastener, may not need  
 To be compelled to bring forth fruits of wisdom!

ELECTRA. It is all done, on my part; for at last  
 I have the wit to choose the stronger side.

*The scene opens, disclosing the body of CLYTÆMNESTRA, veiled; ORESTES  
 and PYLADES standing by.*

ÆGISTHUS. Zeus, I behold a thing—that hath not fallen,  
 But by the jealousy of Heaven!—Nay,  
 If there is yet a Nemesis, I unsay it!  
 Loosen all coverings from before my face,  
 That of me too my kindred may obtain  
 The meed of mourning.

ELECTRA. Take them off yourself.  
 To see this corpse, and speak with amity,  
 Is not my work, but yours.

ÆGISTHUS. Well, you say true,  
 And I will do your bidding; in mean while,  
 If she is in the house, call Clytæmnestra.

*He raises the veil.*

ORESTES. Seek her no further; she is at your side.

ÆGISTHUS. O what is this?

ORESTES. Who is it, whom you fear?

Who is it, whom you do not recognize?

ÆGISTHUS. Who are the men into whose very toils

I have fallen, unhappy?

ORESTES. Did you never dream

They were alive, whom you miscall as dead?

ÆGISTHUS. O me, I understand you! It must be

No other than Orestes speaks to me.

ORESTES. Excellent seer! and yet so long deceived!

ÆGISTHUS. I am lost, miserably! But suffer me

To speak a little—

ELECTRA. Brother, in Heaven's name let him

No further parley, and prolong discourse.

Once overtaken by calamity,

What profit should a man who is to die

Draw from delay? Nay, kill him on the spot,

And cast him forth, slain, to such buriers

As it is fitting he should meet withal,

Out of our eye-sight! This alone can be

An expiation for my wrongs of old.

ORESTES. Go thou within, with speed. The contest now

Lies not in words, but for thy life-blood.

ÆGISTHUS. Nay,

Why do you drag me to the house? What need

Of darkness, if the deed is honourable?

Why are you backward to despatch me here?

ORESTES. Prescribe not thou! Pass, where thou slew'st my father,

And perish there.

ÆGISTHUS. Is it fated that this roof

Must witness all the ills of Pelops' race,

That are, or shall be?

ORESTES. Thine, at any rate.

I am soothsayer good enough to tell thee that!

ÆGISTHUS. The craft you boast was not inherited, then!

ORESTES. Thou prat'st, and prat'st; and the way lengthens out;

Move on.

ÆGISTHUS. Lead forward.

ORESTES. Thou must foot it first.

ÆGISTHUS. Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES. Rather, that thy soul

May not pass easily; this bitterness

I must reserve for thee. And well it were

If this quick justice could be dealt on all—

Whoever will transgress the bounds of right,

To strike him dead.

[*Kills ÆGISTHUS.*

So should not villainy thrive.

CHORUS. O Atreus' seed!

How hardly, after many labours past,

Art thou come forth to liberty at last,

Through this new trial perfected indeed!

[*Exeunt omnes.*

PERSONS REPRESENTED

ŒDIPUS, *King of Thebes.*

PRIEST of Zeus.

CREON, *brother to Jocasta the Queen.*

TIRESIAS, *a Prophet, with the title of King.*

*A Messenger from Corinth.*

*An old Shepherd.*

*A Second Messenger, servant of Œdipus' household.*

JOCASTA *the Queen, wife of Œdipus, formerly married to Laius, the last King.*

ANTIGONE, } *daughters to Œdipus and Jocasta.*  
ISMENE, }

*The CHORUS is composed of Senators of Thebes.*

*Inhabitants of Thebes, Attendants.*

*A Boy leading Tiresias.*

*Scene, before the Royal Palace at Thebes. Enter ŒDIPUS; to him the PRIEST of Zeus, and Inhabitants of Thebes.*

ŒDIPUS. Children, you modern brood of Cadmus old,  
What mean you, sitting in your sessions here,  
High-coronalled with votive olive-boughs,  
While the whole city teems with incense-smoke,  
And Pæan hymns, and sounds of woe the while?  
Deeming unmeet, my children, this to learn  
From others, by the mouth of messengers,  
I have myself come hither, Œdipus,  
Known far and wide by name. Do thou, old man,  
Since 'tis thy privilege to speak for these,  
Say in what case ye stand; if of alarm,  
Or satisfaction with my readiness  
To afford all aid; hard-hearted must I be,  
Did I not pity such petitioners.

PRIEST. Great Œdipus, my country's governor,  
Thou seest our generations, who besiege  
Thy altars here; some not yet strong enough  
To flutter far; some priests, with weight of years  
Heavy, myself of Zeus; and these, the flower  
Of our young manhood; all the other folk  
Sit, with like branches, in the market-place,  
By the Ismenian hearth oracular



And the twin shrines of Pallas. Lo, the city  
 Labours—thysself art witness—over-deep  
 Already, powerless to uprear her head  
 Out of the abysses of a surge of blood;  
 Stricken in the budding harvest of her soil,  
 Stricken in her pastured herds, and barren travail  
 Of women; and He, the God with spear of fire,  
 Leaps on the city, a cruel pestilence,  
 And harries it; whereby the Cadmean home  
 Is all dispeopled, and with groan and wail  
 The blackness of the Grave made opulent.  
 Not that we count thee as the peer of Heaven,  
 I, nor these children, seat us at thy hearth;  
 But as of men found foremost in affairs,  
 Chances of life and shifts of Providence;  
 Whose coming to our Cadmean town released  
 The toll we paid, of a hard Sorceress,  
 And that, without instruction or advice  
 Of our imparting; but of Heaven it came  
 Thou art named, and known, our life's establisher.  
 Thee therefore, CEdipus, the mightiest head  
 Among us all, all we thy supplicants  
 Implore to find some way to succour us,  
 Whether thou knowest it through some voice from heaven,  
 Or, haply of some man; for I perceive  
 In men experienced that their counsels best  
 Find correspondence in things actual.  
 Haste thee, most absolute sir, be the state's builder!  
 Haste thee, look to it; doth not our country now  
 Call thee deliverer, for thy zeal of yore?  
 Never let us remember of thy rule  
 That we stood once erectly, and then fell;  
 But build this city in stability!  
 With a fair augury didst thou shape for us  
 Our fortune then; like be thy prowess now!  
 If thou wilt rule this land (which thou art lord of),  
 It were a fairer lordship filled with folk  
 Than empty; towers and ships are nothingness,  
 Void of our fellow men to inhabit them.  
 CEdIPUS. Ah my poor children, what you come to seek  
 Is known already—not unknown to me.  
 You are all sick, I know it; and in your sickness  
 There is not one of you so sick as I.  
 For in your case his own particular pain  
 Comes to each singly; but my heart at once  
 Groans for the city, and for myself, and you.

Not therefore as one taking rest in sleep  
 Do you uprouse me; rather deem of me  
 As one that wept often, and often came  
 By many ways through labyrinths of care;  
 And the one remedy that I could find  
 By careful seeking—I supplied it. Creon,  
 Menœceus' son, the brother of my queen,  
 I sent to Pytho, to Apollo's house,  
 To ask him by what act or word of mine  
 I might redeem this city; and the hours  
 Already measured even with today  
 Make me solicitous how he has sped;  
 For he is longer absent than the time  
 Sufficient, which is strange. When he shall come,  
 I were a wretch did I not then do all  
 As the God shews.

PRIEST. In happy time thou speak'st;

As these, who tell me Creon is at hand.

ŒDIPUS. Ah King Apollo, might he but bring grace,  
 Radiant in fortune, as he is in face!

PRIEST. I think he comes with cheer; he would not, else,  
 Thus be approaching us with crown on brow,  
 All berries of the bay.

ŒDIPUS. We shall know soon;  
 He is within hearing.

*Enter CREON, attended.*

My good lord and cousin,

Son of Menœceus,

What answer of the God have you brought home?

CREON. Favourable; I mean, even what sounds ominously,  
 If it have issue in the way forthright,  
 May all end well.

ŒDIPUS. How runs the oracle?

I am not confident, nor prone to fear  
 At what you say, so far.

CREON. If you desire

To hear while these stand near us, I am ready  
 To speak at once—or to go in with you.

ŒDIPUS. Speak before all! My heavy load of care  
 More for their sake than for my own I bear.

CREON. What the God told me, that will I declare.  
 Phœbus our Lord gives us express command  
 To drive pollution, bred within this land,  
 Out of the country, and not cherish it  
 Beyond the power of healing.

ŒDIPUS.

By what purge?

What is the tenor of your tragedy?

CREON. Exile, or recompense of death for death;

Since 'tis this blood makes winter to the city.

ŒDIPUS. Whose fate is this he signifies?

CREON.

My liege,

We had a leader, once, over this land,

Called Laius—ere you held the helm of state.

ŒDIPUS. So I did hear; I never saw the man.

CREON. The man is dead; and now, we are clearly bidden

To bring to account certain his murderers.

ŒDIPUS. And where on earth are they? Where shall be found

This dim-seen track-mark of an ancient crime?

CREON. "Within this land," it ran. That which is sought,

That may be caught. What is unheeded 'scapes us.

ŒDIPUS. Was it at home, afield, or anywhere

Abroad, that Laius met this violent end?

CREON. He went professedly on pilgrimage;

But since he started, came back home no more.

ŒDIPUS. Nor any messenger nor way-fellow

Looked on, from whom one might have learnt his story

And used it?

CREON. No, they perished, all but one;

He fled, affrighted; and of what he saw

Had but one thing to say for certain.

ŒDIPUS.

Well

And what was that? one thing might be the means

Of our discovering many, could we gain

Some narrow ground for hope.

CREON.

Robbers, he said,

Met them, and slew him; by no single strength,

But multitude of hands.

ŒDIPUS.

How could your robber

Have dared so far—except there were some practice

With gold from hence?

CREON.

Why, it seemed probable.

But, Laius dead, no man stood up to help

Amid our ills.

ŒDIPUS.

What ill was in the way,

Which, when a sovereignty had lapsed like this,

Kept you from searching of it out?

CREON.

The Sphinx

With her enigma forced us to dismiss

Things out of sight, and look to our own steps.

ŒDIPUS. Well, I will have it all to light again.

Right well did Phœbus, yea and well may you

Insist on this observance toward the dead;  
 So shall you see me, as of right, with you,  
 Venging this country and the God together.  
 Why, 'tis not for my neighbours' sake, but mine,  
 I shall dispel this plague-spot; for the man,  
 Whoever it may be, who murdered him,  
 Lightly might hanker to serve me the same.  
 I benefit myself in aiding him.  
 Up then, my children, straightway, from the floor;  
 Take up your votive branches; let some other  
 Gather the tribes of Cadmus hitherward;  
 Say, I will make clean work. Please Heaven, our state  
 Shall soon appear happy, or desperate.  
 PRIEST. Come children, let us rise; it was for this,  
 Which he himself proclaims, that we came hither.  
 Now may the sender of these oracles,  
 In saving and in plague-staying, Phœbus, come!

[*Exeunt CREON, PRIEST and THEBANS.*

*CÆDIPUS retires.*

*Enter THEBAN SENATORS, as CHORUS.*

I. 1.

CHORUS. O Prophecy of Jove, whose words are sweet,  
 With what doom art thou sent  
 To glorious Thebes, from Pytho's gilded seat?  
 I am distraught with fearful wonderment,  
 I thrill with terror, and wait reverently—  
 Yea, Io Pæan, Delian lord, on thee!  
 What matter thou wilt compass—either strange,  
 Or once again recurrent as the seasons change,  
 Offspring of golden Hope, immortal Oracle,  
 Tell me, O tell!

I. 2.

Athena first I greet with invocation,  
 Daughter of Jove, divine!  
 Next Artemis thy sister, of this nation  
 Keeper, high seated in the encircling shrine,  
 Filled with her praises, of our market-place,  
 And Phœbus, shooting arrows far through space;  
 Appear ye Three, the averters of my fate!  
 If e'er before, when mischief rose upon the state,  
 Ye quenched the flames of evil, putting them away,  
 Come—come to-day!

## II. 1.

Woe, for unnumbered are the ills we bear!  
 Sickness pervades our hosts;  
 Nor is there any spear of guardian care,  
 Wherewith a man might save us, found in all our coasts.  
 For all the fair soil's produce now no longer springs;  
 Nor women from the labour and loud cries  
 Of their child-births arise;  
 And you may see, flying like a bird with wings,  
 One after one, outspeeding the resistless brand,  
 Pass—to the Evening Land.

## II. 2.

In countless hosts our city perisheth.  
 Her children on the plain  
 Lie all unpitied—pitiless—breeding death.  
 Our wives meanwhile, and white-haired mothers in their train,  
 This way and that, suppliant, along the altar-side  
 Sit, and bemoan their doleful maladies;  
 Like flame their pæans rise,  
 With wailing and lament accompanied;  
 For whose dear sake O Goddess, O Jove's golden child,  
 Send Help with favour mild!

## III. 1.

And Ares the Destroyer, him who thus—  
 Not now in harness of brass shields, as wont—  
 Ringed round with clamour, meets us front to front  
 And fevers us,  
 O banish from our country! Drive him back,  
 With winds upon his track,  
 On to the chamber vast of Amphitrite,  
 Or that lone anchorage, the Thracian main;  
 For now, if night leave bounds to our annoy,  
 Day levels all again;  
 Wherefore, O father, Zeus, thou that dost wield the might  
 Of fire-fraught light,  
 Him with thy bolt destroy!

## III. 2.

Next, from the bendings of thy golden string  
 I would see showered thy artillery  
 Invincible, marshalled to succour me,  
 Lycian King!

Next, those flame-bearing beams, arrows most bright,  
Which Artemis by night  
Through Lycian highlands speeds her scattering;  
Thou too, the Evian, with thy Mænad band,  
Thou golden-braided patron of this land  
Whose visage glows with wine,  
O save us from the god whom no gods honour! Hear,  
Bacchus! Draw near,  
And light thy torch of pine!

*Enter CEDIPIUS, attended.*

CEDIPIUS. You are at prayers; but for your prayers' intent  
You may gain help, and of your ill's relief,  
If you will minister to the pestilence,  
And hearken and receive my words, which I—  
A stranger to this tale, and to the deed  
A stranger—shall pronounce; for of myself  
I could not follow up the traces far,  
Not having any key. But, made since then  
A fellow-townsmen to the townsmen here,  
To all you Cadmeans I thus proclaim;  
Whichever of you knows the man, by whom  
Laius the son of Labdacus was slain,  
Even if he is afraid, seeing he himself  
Suppressed the facts that made against himself,  
I bid that man shew the whole truth to me;  
For he shall suffer no disparagement,  
Except to quit the land, unscathed. Again,  
If any knows another—say some stranger  
To have been guilty, let him not keep silence;  
For I will pay him the reward, and favour  
Shall be his due beside it. But again,  
If you will hold your peace, and any man  
From self or friend in terror shall repel  
This word of mine, then—you must hear me say  
What I shall do. Whoe'er he be, I order  
That of this land, whose power and throne are mine,  
None entertain him, none accost him, none  
Cause him to share in prayers or sacrifice  
Offered to Heaven, or pour him lustral wave,  
But all men from their houses banish him;  
Since it is he contaminates us all,  
Even as the Pythian oracle divine  
Revealed but now to me. Such is my succour  
Of him that's dead, and of the Deity.  
And on the guilty head I imprecate



That whether by himself he has lain covert,  
 Or joined with others, without happiness,  
 Evil, in evil, he may pine and die.  
 And for myself I pray, if with my knowledge  
 He should become an inmate of my dwelling,  
 That I may suffer all that I invoked  
 On these just now. Moreover all these things  
 I charge you to accomplish, in behalf  
 Of me, and of the God, and of this land,  
 So ruined, barren and forsaken of Heaven.  
 For even though the matter were not now  
 By Heaven enjoined you, 'twas unnatural  
 For you to suffer it to pass uncleansed,  
 A man most noble having been slain, a king too!  
 Rather, you should have searched it out; but now,  
 Since I am vested with the government  
 Which he held once, and have his marriage-bed,  
 And the same wife; and since our progeny—  
 If his had not miscarried—had sprung from us  
 With common ties of common motherhood—  
 Only that Fate came heavy upon his head—  
 On these accounts I, as for my own father,  
 Will fight this fight, and follow out every clue,  
 Seeking to seize the author of his murder—  
 The scion of Labdacus and Polydore  
 And earlier Cadmus and Agenor old;  
 And such as disobey—the Gods I ask  
 Neither to raise them harvest from the ground  
 Nor children from the womb, but that they perish  
 By this fate present, and yet worse than this;  
 While you, the other Cadmeans, who approve,  
 May succouring Justice and all Gods in heaven  
 Accompany for good for evermore!

I SENATOR. Even as thou didst adjure me, so, my king,  
 I will reply. I neither murdered him,  
 Nor can point out the murderer. For the quest—  
 To tell us who on earth has done this deed  
 Belonged to Phœbus, by whose word it came.

ŒDIPUS. Your words are just; but to constrain the Gods  
 To what they will not, passes all men's power.

I SENATOR. I would say something which appears to me  
 The second chance to this.

ŒDIPUS. And your third, also—  
 If such you have—by all means tell it.

I SENATOR.

Sir,

Tiresias above all men, I am sure,

Ranks as a seer next Phœbus, king with king;  
Of him we might enquire and learn the truth  
With all assurance.

ŒDIPUS. That is what I did;  
And with no slackness; for by Creon's advice  
I sent, twice over; and for some time, now,  
'Tis strange he is not here.

I SENATOR. Then all the rest  
Are but stale words and dumb.

ŒDIPUS. What sort of words  
I am weighing every utterance.

I SENATOR. He was said  
To have been killed by footpads.

ŒDIPUS. So I heard;  
But he who saw it is himself unseen.

I SENATOR. Well, if his bosom holds a grain of fear,  
Curses like yours he never will abide!

ŒDIPUS. Whom the doing awes not, speaking cannot scare.

I SENATOR. Then there is one to expose him: here they come,  
Bringing the godlike seer, the only man  
Who has in him the tongue that cannot lie.

*Enter TIRESIAS, led by a Boy.*

ŒDIPUS. Tiresias, thou who searchest everything,  
Communicable or nameless, both in heaven  
And on the earth—thou canst not see the city,  
But knowest no less what pestilence visits it,  
Wherefrom our only saviour and defence  
We find, sir king, in thee. For Phœbus—if  
Thou dost not know it from the messengers—  
To us, who sent to ask him, sent word back,  
That from this sickness no release should come,  
Till we had found and slain the men who slew  
Laius, or driven them, banished, from the land.  
Wherefore do thou—not sparing augury,  
Either through birds, or any other way  
Thou hast of divination—save thyself,  
And save the city, and me; save the whole mass  
By this dead corpse infected; for in thee  
Stands our existence; and for men, to help  
With might and main is of all tasks the highest.

TIRESIAS. Alas! How terrible it is to know,  
Where no good comes of knowing! Of these matters  
I was full well aware, but let them slip me;  
Else I had not come hither.

ŒDIPUS. But what is it?

How out of heart thou hast come!

TIRESIAS.

Let me go home;

So shalt thou bear thy load most easily—

If thou wilt take my counsel—and I mine.

ŒDIPUS. Thou hast not spoken loyally, nor friendly

Toward the State that bred thee, cheating her

Of this response!

TIRESIAS.

Because I do not see

Thy words, not even thine, going to the mark;

So, not to be in the same plight—

I SENATOR.

For Heaven's sake,

If thou hast knowledge, do not turn away,

When all of us implore thee suppliant!

TIRESIAS.

Ye

Are all unknowing; my say, in any sort,

I will not say, lest I display thy sorrow.

ŒDIPUS. What, you do know, and will not speak? Your mind

Is to betray us, and destroy the city?

TIRESIAS. I will not bring remorse upon myself

And upon you. Why do you search these matters?

Vain, vain! I will not tell you.

ŒDIPUS.

Worst of traitors!

For you would rouse a very stone to wrath—

Will you not speak out ever, but stand thus

Relentless and persistent?

TIRESIAS.

My offence

You censure; but your own, at home, you see not,

And yet blame me!

ŒDIPUS.

Who would not take offence,

Hearing the words in which you flout the city?

TIRESIAS. Well, it will come; keep silence as I may.

ŒDIPUS. And what will come should I not hear from you?

TIRESIAS. I will declare no further. Storm at this,

If't please you, to the wildest height of anger!

ŒDIPUS. At least I will not, being so far in anger,

Spare anything of what is clear to me:

Know, I suspect you joined to hatch the deed;

Yea, did it—all but slaying with your own hands;

And if you were not blind, I should aver

The act was your work only!

TIRESIAS.

Was it so?

I charge you to abide by your decree

As you proclaimed it; nor from this day forth

Speak word to these, or me; being of this land

Yourself the abominable contaminator!

ŒDIPUS. So shamelessly set you this story on foot,

And think, perhaps, you shall go free?

TIRESIAS.

I am

Free! for I have in me the strength of truth.

ŒDIPUS. Who prompted you? for from your art it was not!

TIRESIAS. Yourself! You made me speak, against my will.

ŒDIPUS. Speak! What? Repeat, that I may learn it better!

TIRESIAS. Did you not understand me at first hearing,

Or are you tempting me, when you say "Speak!"

ŒDIPUS. Not so to say for certain; speak again.

TIRESIAS. I say that you are Laius' murderer—

He whom you seek.

ŒDIPUS.

Not without chastisement

Shall you, twice over, utter wounds!

TIRESIAS.

Then shall I

Say something more, that may incense you further?

ŒDIPUS. Say what you please; it will be said in vain.

TIRESIAS. I say you know not in what worst of shame

You live together with those nearest you,

And see not in what evil plight you stand.

ŒDIPUS. Do you expect to go on revelling

In utterances like this?

TIRESIAS.

Yes, if the truth

Has any force at all.

ŒDIPUS.

Why so it has,

Except for you; it is not so with you;

Blind as you are in eyes, and ears, and mind!

TIRESIAS. Fool, you reproach me as not one of these

Shall not reproach you, soon!

ŒDIPUS.

You cannot hurt me,

Nor any other who beholds the light,

Your life being all one night.

TIRESIAS.

Nor is it fated

You by my hand should fall; Apollo is

Sufficient; he will bring it all to pass.

ŒDIPUS. Are these inventions Creon's work, or yours?

TIRESIAS. Your bane is no-ways Creon, but your own self.

ŒDIPUS. O riches, and dominion, and the craft

That excels craft, and makes life enviable,

How vast the grudge that is nursed up for you,

When for this sovereignty, which the state

Committed to my hands, unsought-for, free,

Creon, the trusty, the familiar friend,

With secret mines covets to oust me from it,

And has suborned a sorcerer like this,

An engine-botching crafty cogging knave,

Who has no eyes to see with, but for gain,

And was born blind in the art! Why, tell me now,  
 How stand your claims to prescience? How came it,  
 When the oracular monster was alive,  
 You said no word to set this people free?  
 And yet it was not for the first that came  
 To solve her riddle; sooth was needed then,  
 Which you could not afford; neither from birds,  
 Nor any inspiration; till I came,  
 The unlettered Cædipus, and ended her,  
 By sleight of wit, untaught of augury—  
 I whom you now seek to cast out, in hope  
 To stand upon the steps of Creon's throne!  
 You and the framer of this plot methinks  
 Shall rue your purge for guilt! Dotard you seem,  
 Else by experience you had come to know  
 What thoughts these are you think!

I SENATOR.

As we conceive,

His words appear (and, Cædipus, your own,)  
 To have been said in anger; now not such  
 Our need, but rather to consider this—  
 How best to interpret the God's oracle.  
 TIRESIAS. King as you are, we must be peers at least  
 In argument; I am your equal, there;  
 For I am Loxias' servant, and not yours;  
 So never need be writ of Creon's train.  
 And since you have reproached me with my blindness,  
 I say—you have your sight, and do not see  
 What evils are about you, nor with whom,  
 Nor in what home you are dwelling. Do you know  
 From whom you are? Yea, you are ignorant  
 That to your own you are an enemy,  
 Whether on earth, alive, or under it.  
 Soon from this land shall drive you, stalking grim,  
 Your mother's and your father's two-edged curse,  
 With eyes then dark, though they look proudly now.  
 What place on earth shall not be harbour, then,  
 For your lamenting? What Cithæron-peak  
 Shall not be resonant soon, when you discern  
 What hymen-song was that, which wafted you  
 On a fair voyage, to foul anchorage  
 Under yon roof? and multitudes besides  
 Of ills you know not of shall level you  
 Down to your self—down to your children! Go,  
 Trample on Creon, and on this mouth of mine;  
 But know, there is not one of all mankind  
 That shall be bruised more utterly than you.



ŒDIPUS. Must I endure to hear all this from him?

Hence, to perdition! quickly hence! begone

Back from these walls, and turn you home again.

TIRESIAS. But that you called me, I had not come hither.

ŒDIPUS. I did not know that you would utter folly;

Else I had scarce sent for you, to my house.

TIRESIAS. Yea, such is what we seem, foolish to you,

And to your fathers, who begat you, wise.

ŒDIPUS. What fathers? Stop! Who was it gave me being?

TIRESIAS. This day shall give you birth and death in one.

ŒDIPUS. How all too full of riddles and obscure

Is your discourse!

TIRESIAS. Were you not excellent

At solving riddles?

ŒDIPUS. Ay, cast in my teeth

Matters in which you must allow my greatness!

TIRESIAS. And yet this very fortune was your ruin!

ŒDIPUS. Well, if I saved this city, I care not.

TIRESIAS.

Well,

I am going; and you, boy, take me home.

ŒDIPUS.

Ay, let him.

Your turbulence impedes us, while you stay;

When you are gone, you can annoy no more.

[Retires.

TIRESIAS. I go, having said that I came to say;

Not that I fear your frown; for you possess

No power to kill me; but I say to you—

The man you have been seeking, threatening him,

And loud proclaiming him for Laius' murder,

That man is here; believed a foreigner

Here sojourning; but shall be recognized

For Theban born hereafter; yet not pleased

In the event; for blind instead of seeing,

And poor for wealthy, to a foreign land,

A staff to point his footsteps, he shall go.

Also to his own sons he shall be found

Related as a brother, though their sire,

And of the woman from whose womb he came

Both son and spouse; one that has raised up seed

To his own father, and has murdered him.

Now get you in, and ponder what I say;

And if you can detect me in a lie,

Then come and say that I am no true seer.

[Exeunt TIRESIAS and BOY.

# I. 1.

CHORUS. Who is he, who was said

By the Delphian soothsaying rock



To have wrought with hands blood-red  
 Nameless unspeakable deeds?  
 Time it were that he fled  
 Faster than storm-swift steeds!  
 For upon him springs with a shock,  
 Armed in thunder and fire,  
 The Child of Jove, at the head  
     Of the Destinies dread,  
 That follow, and will not tire.

## I. 2.

For a word but now blazed clear  
 From Parnassus' snow-covered mound,  
 To hunt down the Unknown!  
 He, through the forest drear,  
 By rocks, by cavernous ways,  
 Stalks, like a bull that strays,  
 Heartsore, footsore, alone;  
 Flying from Earth's central seat,  
 Flying the oracular sound  
     That with swift wings' beat  
 For ever circles him round.

## II. 1.

Of a truth dark thoughts, yea dark and fell,  
     The augur wise doth arouse in me,  
     Who neither assent, nor yet gainsay;  
 And what to affirm, I cannot tell;  
     But I flutter in hope, unapt to see  
     Things of to-morrow, or to-day.

Why in Polybus' son they should find a foe,  
     Or he in the heirs of Labdacus,  
     I know no cause, or of old, or late,  
 In test whereof I am now to go  
     Against the repute of Œdipus,  
     To avenge a Labdakid's unknown fate.

## II. 2.

True, Zeus indeed, and Apollo, are wise,  
     And knowers of what concerns mankind;  
     But that word of a seer, a man like me,  
 Weighs more than mine, for a man to prize,  
     Is all unsure. Yea, one man's mind  
     May surpass another's in subtlety;

But never will I, till I see the rest,  
 Assent to those who accuse him now.  
 I saw how the air-borne Maiden came  
 Against him, and proved him wise, by the test,  
 And good to the state; and for this, I trow,  
 He shall not, ever, be put to shame.

*Enter CREON.*

CREON. I am come hither, fellow citizens,  
 Having been told that CEdipus the king  
 Lays grievous accusations to my charge,  
 Which I will not endure. For if he fancies  
 He in our present troubles has endured  
 Aught at my hands, either in word or deed,  
 Tending to harm him, I have no desire  
 My life should be prolonged, bearing this blame.  
 The injury that such a word may do  
 Is no mere trifle, but more vast than any,  
 If I am to be called a criminal  
 Here in the town, and by my friends, and you.  
 I SENATOR. Nay, the reproach, it may be, rather came  
 Through stress of anger, than advisedly.  
 CREON. But it was plainly said, by my advice  
 The prophet gave false answers.

I SENATOR. It was said;  
 But how advised I know not.

CREON. Was this charge  
 Of a set mind, and with set countenance  
 Imputed against me?

I SENATOR. I do not know.  
 I have no eyes for what my masters do.  
 But here he comes, himself, forth of the palace.

*Enter CEdIPUS.*

CEdIPUS. Fellow, how cam'st thou hither? Dost thou boast  
 So great a front of daring, as to come  
 Under my roof, the assassin clear of me,  
 And manifest pirate of my royalty?  
 Tell me, by heaven, did you detect in me  
 The bearing of a craven, or a fool,  
 That you laid plans to do it; or suppose  
 I should not recognize your work in this,  
 Creeping on slyly, and defend myself?  
 Is it not folly, this attempt of yours,  
 Without a following, without friends, to hunt  
 After a throne, a thing which is achieved

By aid of followers and much revenue?

CREON. Do me this favour; hear me say as much

As you have said; and then, yourself decide.

CEPUS. You are quick to talk, but I am slow to learn

Of you; for I have found you contrary

And dangerous to me.

CREON. Now, this same thing

First hear, how I shall state it.

CEPUS. This same thing

Do not tell me—that you are not a villain!

CREON. If you suppose your arrogance weighs aught

Apart from reason, you are much astray.

CEPUS. If you suppose you can escape the pain

Due for a kinsman's wrong, you are astray!

CREON. You speak with justice; I agree! But tell me,

How is it that you say I injured you?

CEPUS. Did you persuade me that I ought to send

To fetch that canting soothsayer, or no?

CREON. Why yes, and now, I am of the same mind, still.

CEPUS. How long is it since Laius—

CREON.

What? I know not.

CEPUS. Died—disappeared, murdered by violence?

CREON. Long seasons might be numbered, long gone by.

CEPUS. Well, did this seer then practise in the craft?

CREON. Yes, just as wise, and just as much revered.

CEPUS. And did he at that time say one word of me?

CREON. Well, nowhere in my presence, anyhow.

CEPUS. But did not you hold inquest for the dead?

CREON. We did, of course; and got no evidence.

CEPUS. Well then, how came it that this wiseacre

Did not say these things then?

CREON.

I do not know.

In matters where I have no cognizance

I hold my tongue.

CEPUS. This much, at least, you know,

And if you are wise, will say!

CREON.

And what is that?

For if I know it, I shall not refuse.

CEPUS. Why, that unless he had conspired with you

He never would have said that Laius' murder

Was of my doing!

CREON.

If he says so, you know.

Only I claim to know that first from you,

Which you put now to me.

CEPUS.

Learn anything!

For I shall not be found a murderer.

CREON. Well then; you have my sister to your wife?

ŒDIPUS. There's no denying that question.

CREON.

And with her

Rule equal, and in common hold the land?

ŒDIPUS. All she may wish for she obtains of me.

CREON. And make I not a third, equal with you?

ŒDIPUS. Ay, there appears your friendship's falsity.

CREON. Not if you reason with yourself, as I.

And note this first; if you can think that any  
Would rather choose a sovereignty, with fears,  
Than the same power, with undisturbed repose?

Neither am I, by nature, covetous

To be a king, rather than play the king,

Nor any man who has sagacity.

Now I have all things, without fear, from you;

Reigned I myself, I must do much I hated.

How were a throne, then, pleasanter for me  
Than painless empire and authority?

I am not yet so blinded as to wish

For honour, other than is joined with gain.

Now am I hail-fellow-well-met with all;

Now every man gives me good-morrow; now

The waiters on your favour fawn on me;

For all their prospering depends thereby.

Then how should I exchange this lot for yours?

A mind well balanced cannot turn to crime.

I neither am in love with this design,

Nor, in a comrade, would I suffer it.

For proof of which, first, go to Pytho; ask

For the oracles, if I declared them truly;

Next, if you can detect me in the act

Of any conjuration with the seer,

Then, by a double vote, not one alone,

Mine and your own, take me, and take my life;

But do not, on a dubious argument,

Charge me beside the facts. For just it is not,

To hold bad men for good, good men for bad,

To no good end; nay, 'twere all one to me

To throw away a friend, a worthy one,

And one's own life, which most of all one values.

Ah well; in time, you will see these things plainly;

For time alone shews a man's honesty,

But in one day you may discern his guilt.

1 SENATOR. His words sound fair—to one who fears to fall;

For swift in counsel is unsafe, my liege.

ŒDIPUS. When he who plots against me in the dark

Comes swiftly on, I must be swift in turn.  
If I stay quiet, his ends will have been gained,  
And mine all missed.

CREON. What is it that you want?  
To expel me from the country?

ÆDIPUS. Not at all.

Your death I purpose, not your banishment.

CREON. Not without shewing, first, what a thing is jealousy!

ÆDIPUS. You talk like one who will not yield, nor heed.

CREON. Because I see you mean injuriously.

ÆDIPUS. Not to myself!

CREON. No more you ought to me!

ÆDIPUS. You are a traitor!

CREON. What if you are no judge?

ÆDIPUS. I must be ruler.

CREON. Not if you rule badly.

ÆDIPUS. City, my city!

CREON. The city is mine too,

And not yours only.

I SENATOR. Good my lords, have done,

Here is Jocasta; in good time, I see her

Come to you from the palace; with her aid

'Twere meet to appease your present difference.

*Enter* JOCASTA.

JOCASTA. Unhappy men, what was it made you raise

This senseless broil of words? Are you not both

Ashamed of stirring private grievances,

The land being thus afflicted? Get you in—

And, Creon, do you go home; push not mere nothing

On to some terrible calamity!

CREON. Sister, your husband Ædipus thinks fit

To treat me villainously; choosing for me

Of two bad things, one; to expatriate me,

Or seize and kill me.

ÆDIPUS. I admit it, wife;

For I have found him out in an offence

Against my person, joined with treachery.

CREON. So may I never thrive, but perish, banned

Of Heaven, if I have done a thing to you

Of what you charge against me!

JOCASTA. Ædipus!

O in Heaven's name believe it! Above all

Revere this oath in heaven; secondly

Myself, and these, who stand before you here.

I SENATOR. Hear her, my king! With wisdom and goodwill

I pray you hear!

ŒDIPUS. What would you have me grant?

I SENATOR. Respect his word; no bauble, heretofore;  
And by this oath made weighty.

ŒDIPUS. Do you know

For what you ask?

I SENATOR. I do.

ŒDIPUS. Say what you mean, then!

I SENATOR. That you expel not, ever, with disgrace,  
The friend, who has abjured it, on a charge  
Void of clear proof.

ŒDIPUS. Now, understand it well;  
Seek this, you seek my death or exile!

I SENATOR. Nay,

By the Sun-god, first of all Gods in heaven!  
So may I perish, to the uttermost,  
Cut off from Heaven, without the help of men,  
If I have such a thought! But the land's waste  
Will break my heart with grief—and that this woe,  
Your strife, is added to its former woe.

ŒDIPUS. Well, let him go, though I get slain outright,  
Or thrust by force, dishonoured, from the land;  
Your voice, not his, makes me compassionate,  
Pleading for pity; he, where'er he be,  
Shall have my hatred.

CREON. You display your spleen  
In yielding; but, when your wrath passes bound,  
Are formidable! Tempers such as yours  
Most grievous are to their own selves to bear,  
Not without justice.

ŒDIPUS. Leave me; get you gone!

CREON. I go; you know me not; these know me honest.

[Exit.

I SENATOR. Lady, what hinders you from taking him  
Into the house?

JOCASTA. I would know how this happened.

I SENATOR. A blind surmise arose, out of mere babble;  
But even what is unjust inflicts a sting.

JOCASTA. On part of both?

I SENATOR. Yes truly.

JOCASTA. And what was said?

I SENATOR. Enough it seems, enough it seems to me,  
Under the former trouble of the land,  
To leave this where it lies.

ŒDIPUS. Do you perceive  
How far you are carried—a well-meaning man!  
Slurring my anger thus, and blunting it?



1 SENATOR. I said it, O my king, not once alone—  
But be assured, I should have shewn myself  
Robbed of my wits, useless for work of wit,  
Renouncing thee! who didst impel the sails  
Of my dear land, baffled mid straits, right onward,  
And it may be, wilt waft her safely now!

JOCASTA. For Heaven's sake tell me too, my lord, what was it  
Caused you so deep an anger?

ÆDIPUS. I will tell you;

For I respect you, lady, more than these;

'Twas Creon—at plots which he has laid for me.

JOCASTA. If you will charge the quarrel in plain terms,  
Why speak!

ÆDIPUS. He says that I am Laius' slayer.

JOCASTA. Of his own knowledge, or on hearsay?

ÆDIPUS. Nay,

But by citation of a knavish seer;

As for himself, he keeps his words blame-free.

JOCASTA. Now set you free from thought of that you talk of;

Listen and learn, nothing in human life

Turns on the soothsayer's art. Tokens of this

I'll show you in few words. To Laius once

There came an oracle, I do not say

From Phœbus' self, but from his ministers,

That so it should befall, that he should die

By a son's hands, whom he should have by me.

And him—the story goes—robbers abroad

Have murdered, at a place where three roads meet;

While from our son's birth not three days went by

Before, with ancles pinned, he cast him out,

By hands of others, on a pathless moor.

And so Apollo did not bring about

That he should be his father's murderer;

Nor yet that Laius should endure the stroke

At his son's hands, of which he was afraid.

This is what came of soothsayers' oracles;

Whereof take thou no heed. That which we lack,

If a God seek, himself will soon reveal.

ÆDIPUS. What perturbation and perplexity

Take hold upon me, woman, hearing you!

JOCASTA. What stress of trouble is on you, that you say so?

ÆDIPUS. I thought I heard you say Laius was slain

Where three roads meet!

JOCASTA.

Yes, so the rumour ran,

And so runs still.

ÆDIPUS.

And where might be the spot

Where this befell?

JOCASTA. Phocis the land is named;  
There are two separate roads converge in one  
From Daulia and Delphi.

ŒDIPUS. And what time  
Has passed since then?

JOCASTA. It was but just before  
You were installed as ruler of the land,  
The tidings reached the city.

ŒDIPUS. God of Heaven!  
What would'st thou do unto me!

JOCASTA. Œdipus,  
What is it on your mind?

ŒDIPUS. Ask me not yet.  
But Laius—say, what was he like? what prime  
Of youth had he attained to?

JOCASTA. He was tall;  
The first white flowers had blossomed in his hair;  
His figure was not much unlike your own.

ŒDIPUS. Me miserable! It seems I have but now  
Proffered myself to a tremendous curse  
Not knowing!

JOCASTA. How say you? I tremble, O my lord,  
To gaze upon you!

ŒDIPUS. I am sore afraid  
The prophet was not blind; but you will make  
More certain, if you answer one thing more.

JOCASTA. Indeed I tremble; but the thing you ask  
I'll answer, when I know it.

ŒDIPUS. Was he going  
Poorly attended, or with many spears  
About him, like a prince?

JOCASTA. But five in all;  
One was a herald; and one carriage held  
Laius himself.

ŒDIPUS. O, it is plain already!  
Woman, who was it told this tale to you?

JOCASTA. A servant, who alone came safe away.

ŒDIPUS. Is he perchance now present, in the house?

JOCASTA. Why no; for after he was come from thence,  
And saw you governing, and Laius dead,  
He came and touched my hand, and begged of me  
To send him to the fields and sheep-meadows,  
So he might be as far as possible  
From eyesight of the townsmen; and I sent him;  
For he was worthy, for a slave, to obtain

Even greater favours.

ÆDIPUS.

Could we have him back

Quickly?

JOCASTA. We could. But why this order?

ÆDIPUS.

Wife,

I fear me I have spoken far too much;

Wherefore I wish to see him.

JOCASTA.

He shall come!

But I am worthy, in my turn, to know

What weighs so heavily upon you, Sir?

ÆDIPUS. And you shall know; since I have passed so far

The bounds of apprehension. For to whom

Could I impart, passing through such a need,

Greater in place—if that were all—than you?

—I am the son of Polybus of Corinth,

And of a Dorian mother, Merope.

And I was counted most preëminent

Among the townsmen there; up to the time

A circumstance befell me, of this fashion—

Worthy of wonder, though of my concern

Unworthy. At the board a drunken fellow

Over his cups called me a changeling;

And I, being indignant—all that day

Hardly refrained—but on the morrow went

And taxed my parents with it to their face;

Who took the scandal grievously, of him

Who launched the story. Well, with what they said

I was content; and yet the thing still galled me;

For it spread far. So without cognizance

Of sire or mother I set out to go

To Pytho. Phœbus sent me of my quest

Bootless away; but other terrible

And strange and lamentable things revealed,

Saying I should wed my mother, and produce

A race intolerable for men to see,

And be my natural father's murderer.

When I heard that, measuring where Corinth stands

Even thereafter by the stars alone,

Where I might never think to see fulfilled

The scandals of ill prophecies of me,

I fled, an exile. As I journeyed on,

I found myself upon the self-same spot

Where, you say, this king perished. In your ears,

Wife, I will tell the whole. When in my travels

I was come near this place where three roads meet,

There met me a herald, and a man that rode

Now if he shall affirm their number still,  
I did not slay him. One cannot be the same

As many. But if he shall speak of one—

One only, it is evident this deed

Already will have been brought home to me.

JOCASTA. But be assured, that was the word, quite plainly!

And now he cannot blot it out again.

Not I alone, but the whole city heard it.

Then, even if he shift from his first tale,

Not so, my lord, will he at all explain

The death of Laius, as it should have been,

Whom Loxias declared my son must slay!

And after all, the poor thing never killed him,

But died itself before! so that henceforth

I do not mean to look to left or right

For fear of soothsaying!

ÆDIPUS. You are well advised.

Still, send and fetch the labourer; do not miss it.

JOCASTA. I will send quickly. Now let us go within.

I would do nothing that displeases you. [Exeunt ÆDIPUS and JOCASTA.]

#### I. 1.

CHORUS. Let it be mine to keep  
The holy purity of word and deed  
Foreguided all by mandates from on high  
Born in the ethereal region of the sky,  
Their only sire Olympus; them nor seed  
Of mortal man brought forth, nor Lethe cold  
Shall ever lay to sleep;  
In them Deity is great, and grows not old.

#### I. 2.

Pride is the germ of kings;  
Pride, when puffed up, vainly, with many things  
Unseasonable, unfitting, mounts the wall,  
Only to hurry to that fatal fall,  
Where feet are vain to serve her. But the task  
Propitious to the city God I ask  
Never to take away!  
God I will never cease to hold my stay.

#### II. 1.

But if any man proceed  
Insolently in word or deed,  
Without fear of right, or care

For the seats where Virtues are,  
 Him, for his ill-omened pride,  
 Let an evil death betide!  
 If honestly his gear he will not gain,  
 Nor keep himself from deeds unholy,  
 Nor from inviolable things abstain,  
 Blinded by folly.  
 In such a course, what mortal from his heart  
 Dart upon dart  
 Can hope to avert of indignation?  
 Yea, and if acts like these are held in estimation,  
 Why dance we here our part?

## II. 2.

Never to the inviolate hearth  
 At the navel of the earth,  
 Nor to Abæ's fane, in prayer,  
 Nor the Olympian, will I fare,  
 If it shall not so befall  
 Manifestly unto all.  
 But O our king—if thou art named aright—  
 Zeus, that art Lord of all things ever,  
 Be this not hid from Thee, nor from Thy might  
 Which endeth never.  
 For now already men invalidate  
 The dooms of Fate  
 Uttered for Laius, fading slowly;  
 Apollo's name and rites are nowhere now kept holy;  
 Worship is out of date.

*Enter JOCASTA, attended.*

JOCASTA. Lords of the land, it came into my heart  
 To approach the temples of the Deities,  
 Taking in hand these garlands, and this incense;  
 For Œdipus lets his mind float too light  
 Upon the eddies of all kinds of grief;  
 Nor will he, like a man of soberness,  
 Measure the new by knowledge of the old,  
 But is at mercy of whoever speaks,  
 If he but speak the language of despair.  
 I can do nothing by exhorting him.  
 Wherefore, Lycean Phœbus, unto thee—  
 For thou art very near us—I am come.  
 Bringing these offerings, a petitioner  
 That thou afford us fair deliverance;



Since now we are all frightened, seeing him—  
The vessel's pilot, as 'twere—panic-stricken.

*Enter a MESSENGER.*

MESSENGER. Sirs, might I learn of you, where is the palace  
Of Œdipus the King? or rather, where  
He is himself, if you know, tell me.

I SENATOR.

Stranger,

This is his dwelling, and he is within;  
This lady is his children's mother, too.

MESSENGER. A blessing ever be on hers and her,  
Who is, in such a perfect sort, his wife!

JOCASTA. The like be with you too, as you deserve,  
Sir, for your compliment. But say what end  
You come for, and what news you wish to tell.

MESSENGER. Good to the house, and to your husband, lady.

JOCASTA. Of what sort? and from whom come you?

MESSENGER.

From Corinth.

In that which I am now about to say  
May you find pleasure! and why not? And yet  
Perhaps you may be sorry.

JOCASTA.

But what is it?

How can it carry such ambiguous force?

MESSENGER. The dwellers in the land of Isthmia,  
As was there said, intend to appoint him king.

JOCASTA. What! Is not Polybus, the old prince, still reigning?

MESSENGER. No, truly; he is Death's subject, in the grave.

JOCASTA. How say you, father? Is Polybus no more?

MESSENGER. I stake my life upon it, if I lie!

JOCASTA. Run, girl, and tell your master instantly. [*Exit an ATTENDANT.*]

O prophecies of Gods, where are you now!

Œdipus fled, long since, from this man's presence,

Fearing to kill him; and now he has died

A natural death, not by his means at all!

*Enter ŒDIPUS.*

ŒDIPUS. O my most dear Jocasta, wife of mine,  
Why did you fetch me hither from the house?

JOCASTA. Hear this man speak! Listen and mark, to what  
The dark responses of the God are come!

ŒDIPUS. And who is this? What says he?

JOCASTA.

He's from Corinth,

To tell us that your father Polybus  
Lives no more, but is dead!

ŒDIPUS.

What say you, sir?

Tell your own tale yourself.

MESSENGER. If first of all  
 I must deliver this for certainty,  
 Know well, that he has gone the way of mortals.  
 CÆDIPUS. Was it by treason, or some chance disease?  
 MESSENGER. A little shock prostrates an aged frame!  
 CÆDIPUS. Sickness, you mean, was my poor father's end?  
 MESSENGER. Yes, and old age; his term of life was full.  
 CÆDIPUS. Heigh ho! Why, wife! why should a man regard  
 The oracular hearth of Pytho, or the birds  
 Cawing above us, by whose canons I  
 Was to have slain my father? He is dead,  
 And buried out of sight; and here am I,  
 Laying no finger to the instrument,  
 (Unless, indeed, he pined for want of me,  
 And so, I killed him!) Well, Polybus is gone;  
 And with him all those oracles of ours  
 Bundled to Hades, for old songs, together!  
 JOCASTA. Did I not say so all along?

CÆDIPUS. You did;  
 But I was led astray by fear.

JOCASTA. Well, now  
 Let none of these predictions any more  
 Weigh on your mind!

CÆDIPUS. And how can I help dreading  
 My mother's bed?

JOCASTA. But why should men be fearful,  
 O'er whom Fortune is mistress, and foreknowledge  
 Of nothing sure? Best take life easily,  
 As a man may. For that maternal wedding,  
 Have you no fear; for many men ere now  
 Have dreamed as much; but he who by such dreams  
 Sets nothing, has the easiest life of it.

CÆDIPUS. All these things would have been well said of you,  
 Were not my mother living still; but now,  
 She being alive, there is all need of dread;  
 Though you say well.

JOCASTA. And yet your father's burial  
 Lets in much daylight!

CÆDIPUS. I acknowledge, much.  
 Still, her who lives I fear.

MESSENGER. But at what woman  
 Are you dismayed?

CÆDIPUS. At Merope, old man,  
 The wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER. And what of her  
 Causes you terror?

ŒDIPUS. A dark oracle,  
Stranger, from heaven.

MESSENGER. May it be put in words?  
Or is it wrong another man should know it?

ŒDIPUS. No, not at all. Why, Loxias declared  
That I should one day marry my own mother,  
And with my own hands shed my father's blood.  
Wherefore from Corinth I have kept away  
Far, for long years; and prospered; none the less  
It is most sweet to see one's parents' face.

MESSENGER. And in this apprehension you became  
An emigrant from Corinth?

ŒDIPUS. And, old man,  
Desiring not to be a parricide.

MESSENGER. Why should I not deliver you, my liege—  
Since my intent in coming here was good—  
Out of this fear?

ŒDIPUS. Indeed you would obtain  
Good guerdon from me.

MESSENGER. And indeed for this  
Chiefest I came, that upon your return  
I might in some sort benefit.

ŒDIPUS. But I  
Will never go, to meet my parents there!

MESSENGER. O son, 'tis plain you know not what you do!

ŒDIPUS. How so, old man? in Heaven's name tell me!

MESSENGER. If

On this account you shun the journey home!

ŒDIPUS. Of course I fear lest Phœbus turn out true.

MESSENGER. Lest through your parents you incur foul stain?

ŒDIPUS. Yes, father, yes; that is what always scares me.

MESSENGER. Now do you know you tremble, really, at nothing?

ŒDIPUS. How can that be, if I was born their child?

MESSENGER. Because Polybus was nought akin to you!

ŒDIPUS. What, did not Polybus beget me?

MESSENGER. No,  
No more than I did; just so much as I!

ŒDIPUS. How, my own sire no more than—nobody?

MESSENGER. But neither he begat you, nor did I.

ŒDIPUS. Then from what motive did he call me son?

MESSENGER. Look here; he had you as a gift from me.

ŒDIPUS. And loved me then, so much, at second hand?

MESSENGER. Yes, his long childlessness prevailed on him.

ŒDIPUS. And did you find or purchase me, to give him?

MESSENGER. I found you in Cithæron's wooded dells.

ŒDIPUS. How came you to be journeying in these parts?

MESSENGER. I tended flocks upon the mountains here.

ÆDIPUS. You were a shepherd, and you ranged for hire?

MESSENGER. But at the same time your preserver, son!

ÆDIPUS. You found me in distress? What was my trouble?

MESSENGER. Your ancle joints may witness.

ÆDIPUS.

O, why speak you

Of that old evil?

MESSENGER. I untied you, when

You had the soles of both your feet bored through.

ÆDIPUS. A shameful sort of swaddling bands were mine.

MESSENGER. Such, that from them you had the name you bear.

ÆDIPUS. Tell me, by heaven! at sire's or mother's hand—

MESSENGER. I know not: he who gave you knows of that

Better than I.

ÆDIPUS. You got me from another?

You did not find me?

MESSENGER.

No, another shepherd

Gave you to me.

ÆDIPUS.

Who was he? are you able

To point him out?

MESSENGER.

They said that he was one

Of those who followed Laius, whom you know.

ÆDIPUS. Him who was once the monarch of this land?

MESSENGER. Precisely! This man was his herdsman.

ÆDIPUS.

Now

Is this man still alive for me to see?

MESSENGER. You must know best, the people of the place.

ÆDIPUS. Is any here among you bystanders,

Who knows the herdsman whom he tells us of,

From seeing him, either in the fields or here?

Speak! it were time that this had been cleared up.

1 SENATOR. I think he is no other than that peasant

Whom you were taking pains to find, before;

But she could say as well as any one—

Jocasta.

ÆDIPUS. Lady, you remember him

Whose coming we were wishing for but now;

Does he mean him?

Jocasta.

Why ask who 'twas he spoke of?

Nay, never mind—never remember it—

'Twas idly spoken!

ÆDIPUS.

Nay, it cannot be

That having such a clue I should refuse

To solve the mystery of my parentage!

Jocasta. For Heaven's sake, if you care for your own life,

Don't seek it! I am sick, and that's enough!

ŒDIPUS. Courage! At least, if I be thrice a slave,  
Born so three-deep, it cannot injure you!

JOCASTA. But I beseech you, hearken! Do not do it!

ŒDIPUS. I will not hearken—not to know the whole.

JOCASTA. I mean well; and I tell you for the best!

ŒDIPUS. What you call best is an old sore of mine.

JOCASTA. Wretch, what thou art O might'st thou never know!

ŒDIPUS. Will some one go and fetch the herdsman hither?  
She is welcome to her gilded lineage!

JOCASTA.

O

Woe, woe, unhappy! This is all I have  
To say to thee, and no word more, for ever!

[Exit.

I SENATOR. Why has the woman vanished, Œdipus,  
Driven so wild with grief? I am afraid  
Out of her silence will break forth some trouble.

ŒDIPUS. Break out what will, I shall not hesitate,  
Low though it be, to trace the source of me.  
But she, perhaps, being, as a woman, proud,  
Of my unfit extraction is ashamed.

—I deem myself the child of Fortune! I  
Shall not be shamed of her, who favours me;  
Seeing I have her for mother; and for kin  
The liminary Moons, that found me small,  
That fashioned me for great! Parented thus,  
How could I ever in the issue prove  
Other—that I should leave my birth unknown?

1.

CHORUS. If I am a true seer,  
My mind from error clear,  
Tomorrow's moon shall not pass over us,  
Ere, O Cithæron, we  
Shall magnify in thee  
The land, the lap, the womb of Œdipus;  
And we shall hymn thy praises, for good things  
Of thy bestowing, done unto our kings.  
Yea, Phœbus, if thou wilt, amen, so might it be!

2.

Who bare thee? Which, O child,  
Over the mountain-wild  
Sought to by Pan of the immortal Maids?  
Or Loxias—was he  
The sire who fathered thee?  
For dear to him are all the upland glades.



Was it Cyllene's lord acquired a son,  
Or Bacchus, dweller on the heights, from one  
Of those he liest loves, Oreads of Helicon?

*Enter ATTENDANTS with an OLD MAN, a Shepherd.*

CEDIPUS. If I may guess, who never met with him,  
I think I see that herdsman, Senators,  
We have long been seeking; for his ripe old age  
Harmoniously accords with this man's measure;  
Besides, I recognize the men who bring him  
As of my household; but in certainty  
You can perhaps exceed me, who beheld  
The herdsman formerly.

I SENATOR. Why, to be sure,  
I recognize him; for he was a man  
Trusty as any Laius ever had  
About his pastures.

CEDIPUS. You I ask the first,  
The Corinthian stranger; do you speak of him?

MESSSENGER. Yes, him you see.

CEDIPUS. Sirrah, old man, look here;  
Answer my questions. Were you Laius' man?

OLD MAN. Truly his thrall; not bought, but bred at home.

CEDIPUS. Minding what work, or in what character?

OLD MAN. Most of my time I went after the flocks.

CEDIPUS. In what directions, chiefly, were your folds?

OLD MAN. There was Cithæron; and a bit near by.

CEDIPUS. Do you know this man, then? Did you see him there?

OLD MAN. Him? After what? What man do you mean?

CEDIPUS. This fellow  
Here present; did you ever meet with him?

OLD MAN. Not so to say off-hand, from memory.

MESSSENGER. And that's no wonder, sir; but beyond doubt

I will remind him, though he has forgotten,

I am quite sure he knows, once on a time,

When in the bit about Cithæron there—

He with two flocks together, I with one—

I was his neighbour for three whole half years

From spring-tide onward to the Bear-ward's day;

And with the winter to my folds I drove,

And he to Laius' stables. Are these facts,

Or are they not—what I am saying?

OLD MAN. Yes,

You speak the truth; but it was long ago.

MESSSENGER. Come, say now, don't you mind that you then gave me  
A baby boy to bring up for my own?



OLD MAN. What do you mean? Why do you ask it me?

MESSENGER. This is the man, good fellow; who was then  
A youngling!

OLD MAN. Out upon you! Hold your peace!

ŒDIPUS. Nay, old man, do not chide him; for your words  
Deserve a chiding rather than his own!

OLD MAN. O best of masters, what is my offence?

ŒDIPUS. Not telling of that boy he asks about.

OLD MAN. He says he knows not what! He is all astray!

ŒDIPUS. You will not speak of grace—you shall perforce!

OLD MAN. Do not for God's sake harm me, an old man!

ŒDIPUS. Quick, some one, twist his hands behind him!

OLD MAN.

Wretch!

What have I done? What do you want to know?

ŒDIPUS. Did you give him that boy he asks about?

OLD MAN. I gave it him. Would I had died that day!

ŒDIPUS. Tell the whole truth, or you will come to it!

OLD MAN. I am undone far more, though, if I speak!

ŒDIPUS. The man is trifling with us, I believe.

OLD MAN. No, no; I said I gave it, long ago!

ŒDIPUS. Where did you get it? At home, or from some other?

OLD MAN. It was not mine; another gave it me.

ŒDIPUS. Which of these citizens? and from what roof?

OLD MAN. Don't, master, for God's sake, don't ask me more!

ŒDIPUS. You are a dead man, if I speak again!

OLD MAN. Then—'twas a child—of Laius' household.

ŒDIPUS.

What,

Slave-born? or one of his own family?

OLD MAN. O, I am at the horror, now, to speak!

ŒDIPUS. And I to hear. But I must hear—no less.

OLD MAN. Truly it was called his son; but she within,

Your lady, could best tell you how it was.

ŒDIPUS. Did she then give it you?

OLD MAN.

My lord, even so.

ŒDIPUS. For what?

OLD MAN.

For me to make away with it.

ŒDIPUS. Herself the mother? miserable!

OLD MAN.

In dread

Of evil prophecies—

ŒDIPUS.

What prophecies?

OLD MAN. That he should kill his parents, it was said.

ŒDIPUS. How came you then to give it to this old man?

OLD MAN. For pity, O my master! thinking he

Would carry it away to other soil,

From whence he came; but he to the worst of harms

Saved it! for if thou art the man he says,

Sure thou wast born destined to misery!

ŒDIPUS. Woe! woe! It is all plain, indeed! O Light,  
This be the last time I shall gaze on thee,  
Who am revealed to have been born of those  
Of whom I ought not—to have wedded whom  
I ought not—and slain whom I might not slay!

[Exit.

I. 1.

CHORUS. O generations of mankind!

How do I find

Your lives nought worth at all!

For who is he—what state

Is there, more fortunate

Than only to seem great,

And then, to fall?

I having thee for pattern, and thy lot—

Thine, O poor Œdipus—I envy not

Aught in mortality;

For this is he

I. 2.

Who, shooting far beyond the rest,

Won wealth all-blest,

Slaying, Zeus, thy monster-maid,

Crook-taloned, boding; and

Who did arise and stand

Betwixt death and our land,

A tower of aid;

Yea for this cause thou hast been named our king,

And honoured in the highest, governing

The city of Thebæ great

In royal state.

II. 1.

And now, who lives more utterly undone?

Who with sad woes, who with mischances rude

Stands closer yoked by life's vicissitude?

O honoured head of Œdipus, for whom

Within the same wide haven there was room

To come—child, to the birth—

Sire, to the nuptial bower,

How could the furrows of thy parent earth—

How could they suffer thee, O hapless one,

In silence, to this hour?

## II. 2.

Time found thee out—Time who sees everything—  
 Unwittingly guilty; and arraigns thee now  
 Consort ill-sorted, unto whom are bred  
 Sons of thy getting, in thine own birth-bed.  
 O scion of Laius' race,  
 Would I had never never seen thy face!  
 For I lament, even as from lips that sing  
 Pouring a dirge; yet verily it was thou  
 Gav'st me to rise  
 And breathe again, and close my watching eyes.

*Enter a second MESSENGER.*

2 MESSENGER. O you most honoured ever of this land,  
 What deeds have you to hear, what sights to see,  
 What sorrow to endure, if you still cherish  
 The house of Labdacus with loyalty?  
 For Ister I suppose or Phasis' wave  
 Never could purge this dwelling from the ills  
 It covers—or shall instantly reveal,  
 Invited, not inflicted; of all wounds,  
 Those that seem wilful are the worst to bear.

1 SENATOR. There was no lack, in what we knew before,  
 Of lamentable; what have you more to say?

2 MESSENGER. The speediest of all tales to hear and tell;  
 The illustrious Jocasta is no more.

1 SENATOR. Unhappy woman! From what cause?

2 MESSENGER. Self-slain.

Of what befell the saddest part is spared;  
 For you were not a witness. None the less  
 So far as I can tell it you shall hear  
 Her miserable story. When she passed  
 So frantically inside the vestibule,  
 She went straight onward to the bed-chamber,  
 With both her hands tearing her hair; the doors  
 She dashed to as she entered, crying out  
 On Laius, long since dead, calling to mind  
 His fore-begotten offspring, by whose hands  
 He, she said, died, and left to his own seed  
 Its mother's most unnatural bearing-bed.  
 Nor did she not bewail that nuptial-couch  
 Where she brought forth, unhappy, brood on brood,  
 Spouse to her spouse, and children to her child.  
 And then—I know no further how she perished;

For Œdipus brake in, crying aloud;  
For whom it was impossible to watch  
The ending of her misery; but on him  
We gazed, as he went raging all about,  
Beseeching us to furnish him a sword  
And say where he could find his wife—no wife,  
Rather the mother-soil both of himself  
And children; and, as he raved thus, some Power  
Shews him—at least, none of us present did.  
Then, shouting loud, he sprang upon the doors  
As following some guide, and burst the bars  
Out of their sockets, and alights within.  
There we beheld his wife hanging, entwined  
In a twined noose. He seeing her, with a groan  
Looses the halter; then, when on the ground  
Lay the poor wretch, dreadful it was to see  
What followed; snatching from her dress gold pins  
Wherewith she was adorned, he lifted them,  
And smote the nerves of his own eyeballs, saying  
Something like this—that they should see no more  
Evils like those he had endured or wrought;  
Darkling, thereafter, let them gaze on forms  
He might not see, and fail to recognize  
The faces he desired! Chanting this burden,  
Not once, but many times, he raised his hand  
And stabbed his eyes; so that from both of them  
The blood ran down his face, not drop by drop,  
But all at once, in a dark shower of gore.  
—These are the ills that from a two-fold source,  
Not one alone, but in both wife and spouse,  
Mingled together, have burst forth at once.  
Their former pristine happiness indeed  
Was happiness before; but in this hour  
Shame—lamentation—Atè—death—of all  
That has a name of evil, nought's away!  
1 SENATOR. And does he stand in any respite now  
Of misery, poor soul?

2 MESSENGER.                   He calls aloud  
For some one to undo the bolts, and shew  
To all the Cadmeans him, his father's slayer—  
His mother's—uttering words unhallowed—words  
I may not speak; that he will cast himself  
Forth of the land, abide no more at home  
Under the curse of his own cursing. Nay,  
But he lacks force, and guidance; for his sickness  
Is more than man can bear. See for yourself;

For these gates open, and you will straight behold  
A sight—such as even he that loathes must pity!

*Enter CÆDIPUS blind.*

CHORUS. O sorrow, lamentable for eyes to see!  
Sorest of all past ills encountering me!  
What frenzy, O wretch, is this, that came on thee?

What Deity was it that with a leap so great—  
Farther than farthest—sprang on thy sad fate?  
Woe is me, woe is me for thee—unfortunate!

Fain would I gaze at thee, would ask thee much,  
Many things learn of thee, wert thou not such  
As I may not even behold, as I shudder to touch.

CÆDIPUS. Me miserable! Whither must I go?  
Ah whither flits my voice, borne to and fro?  
Thou Power unseen, how hast thou brought me low!

I SENATOR. To ills, intolerable to hear or see.

CÆDIPUS. Thou horror of thick darkness overspread,  
Thou shadow of unutterable dread  
Not to be stemmed or stayed, fallen on my head—

Woe's me once more! How crowd upon my heart  
Stings of these wounds, and memories of woe!

I SENATOR. No marvel if thou bear a double smart  
And writhe, so stricken, with a two-fold throe!

CÆDIPUS. Still art thou near me—ready still to tend  
And to endure me, faithful to the end,  
Blind as I am, with kindness, O my friend!

For strange thou art not, but full well I know  
That voice of thine, all darkling though I be.

I SENATOR. Rash man, how could'st thou bear to outrage so  
Thine eyes? What Power was it, that wrought on thee?

CÆDIPUS. Apollo, Apollo fulfils,  
O friends, my measure of ills—  
Fills my measure of woe;  
Author was none, but I,

None other, of the blow;  
 For why was I to see,  
     When to descry  
 No sight on earth could have a charm for me?

I SENATOR. It was even as thou sayest.

ŒDIPUS. What was there left for sight?  
     What, that could give delight?  
     Or whose address,  
 O friends, could I still hear with happiness?  
     Lead me to exile straight;  
     Lead me, O my friends, the worst  
 Of murderers, of mortals most accurst,  
     Yea and to Gods chief object of their hate.

I SENATOR. Of cunning hapless, as of hapless fate,  
 I would that I had never known thy name!

ŒDIPUS.      May he perish, whoe'er 'twas drew me  
     Out of the cruel gyve  
     That bound my feet, on the lea!  
     He who saved me alive,  
     Who rescued me from fate,  
     Shewing no kindness to me!  
     Sorrow so great,  
 Had I died then, had spared both mine and me.

I SENATOR. Fain were I too it had been so.

ŒDIPUS.      Not then had I become  
     My father's murderer,  
 Nor wedded her I have my being from:  
     Whom now no God will bless,  
     Child of incestuousness  
 In her that bare me, being the spouse of her;  
 Yea if aught ill worse than all ill be there,  
     That Œdipus must bear.

I SENATOR. I know not how to say thou hast done well;  
 For it were better for thee now to die,  
 Than to live on in blindness.

ŒDIPUS.                      Tell me not—  
 Give me no counsel now, that what is done  
 Has not been done thus best. I know not how  
 With seeing eyes I could have looked upon  
 My father—coming to the under-world,  
 Or my poor mother, when against them both



I have sinned sins, worse than a halter's meed.  
 Or do you think that children were a sight  
 Delectable for me to gaze at, born  
 As they were born? Never with eyes of mine!  
 No, nor the city, nor the citadel,  
 Nor consecrated shrines of deities,  
 From which, to my most utter misery,  
 I, of all other men in Thebes the man  
 Most bravely nurtured, cut myself away,  
 And of my own mouth dictated to all  
 To thrust out me, the impious—me, declared  
 Abominable of Heaven, and Laius' son.  
 Was I, who in myself made evident  
 So dark a stain, with unaverted eyes  
 To look on these? That least of all! Nay rather,  
 If there were any way to choke the fount  
 Of hearing, through my ears, I would have tried  
 To seal up all this miserable frame  
 And live blind, deaf to all things; sweet it were  
 To dwell in fancy, out of reach of pain.  
 —Cithæron! wherefore didst thou harbour me!  
 Why not at once have slain me? Never then  
 Had I displayed before the face of men  
 Who and from whom I am! O Polybus,  
 And Corinth, and the old paternal roof  
 I once called mine, with what thin film of honour,  
 Corruption over-skinned, you fostered me,  
 Found ill myself, and from ill parents, now!  
 O you, the three roads, and the lonely brake,  
 The copse, and pass at the divided way,  
 Which at my hands drank blood that was my own—  
 My father's—do you keep in memory  
 What in your sight I did, and how again  
 I wrought, when I came hither? Wedlock, wedlock,  
 You gave me being, you raised up seed again  
 To the same lineage, and exhibited  
 In one incestuous flesh son—brother—sire,  
 Bride, wife and mother; and all ghestlied deeds  
 Wrought among men! But O, ill done, ill worked!  
 In Heaven's name hide me with all speed away,  
 Or slay me, or send adrift upon some sea  
 Where you may look on me no longer! Come,  
 Touch, if you will, a miserable man;  
 Pray you, fear nothing; for my misery  
 No mortal but myself can underbear.  
 1 SENATOR. Creon is at hand; he is the man you need,  
 Who must decide and do; being, after you,

The sole protector left us, for the land.

ŒDIPUS. Ah Heaven, what language shall I hold to him?

What rightful credit will appear in me?

For I have been found wholly in the wrong

In all that passed between us heretofore!

*Enter CREON.*

CREON. Not as a mocker come I, Œdipus,

Nor to reproach for any former pain.

But you—even if you reverence no more

Children of men,—at least so far revere

The royal Sun-god's all-sustaining fire,

Not to parade, thus flagrant, such a sore

As neither earth nor day can tolerate,

Nor dew from Heaven! Take him in instantly!

That kindred only should behold and hear

The griefs of kin, fits best with decency.

ŒDIPUS. In Heaven's name, seeing that you transported me

Beyond all hope, coming, the first of men,

To me the last of men, grant me one boon!

'Tis for your good, not for my own, I say it.

CREON. What is it that you crave so eagerly?

ŒDIPUS. Out of this country cast me with all speed,

Where I may pass without accost of men.

CREON. So had I done, be sure, had I not wished

To learn our duty, first, at the God's mouth.

ŒDIPUS. Surely his oracle was all made plain,

Me, the profane, the parricide, to slay!

CREON. So was it said; but in our present need

'Tis better to enquire what we must do.

ŒDIPUS. Will ye seek answer for a wretch like me?

CREON. Even you might trust what the God answers, now.

ŒDIPUS. Ay, and I charge thee, and will beg of thee,

Order thyself such burial as thou wilt,

For her who lies within; seeing it is meet

Thou do so, for thine own. But never more

Be this my native town burdened with me

For living inmate; rather suffer me

To haunt the mountains—where my mountain is,

Cithæron, which my mother and my sire,

Living, appointed for my sepulchre,

That as they meant, my slayers, I may expire.

Howbeit this much I know, neither disease

Nor aught beside can kill me; never else

Had I been rescued from the brink of death,

But for some dire calamity. Ah well,

Let our own fate wag onward as it may;  
 And for my sons, Creon, take thou no care  
 Upon thee; they are men, so that they never  
 Can lack the means to live, where'er they be;  
 But my two girls, wretched and pitiable,  
 For whose repast was never board of mine  
 Ordered apart, without me, but in all  
 That I partook they always shared with me,  
 Take care of them; and let me, above all else,  
 Touch them with hands, and weep away my troubles!  
 Pardon, my lord; pardon, illustrious sir;  
 If but my hands could feel them, I might seem  
 To have them still, as when I still could see.

*ANTIGONE and ISMENE are brought in.*

—What do I say? In Heaven's name, do I not  
 Hear my two darlings, somewhere shedding tears?  
 And can it be that Creon, pitying me,  
 Sends me my dearest, my two daughters, hither?  
 Is it so indeed?

CREON. Yes, it is I vouchsafed this boon, aware  
 What joy you have and long have had of them.  
 CEDIPIUS. Why then, good luck go with thee, and Providence  
 Be guardian to thee, better than to me,  
 In payment for their coming!—Children dear,  
 Where are you? Come, come hither to my arms—  
 To these brotherly arms—procurers that  
 The eyes—that were your sire's—once bright—should see  
 Thus! who am shewn, O children, to have been  
 Author of you—unseeing—unknowing—in  
 Her bed, whence I derived my being! You  
 I weep for; for I cannot gaze on you;  
 Knowing what is left of bitter in the life  
 Which at men's hands you needs must henceforth live.  
 For to what gatherings of the citizens  
 Will you resort, or to what festivals,  
 Whence you will not, in place of holiday,  
 Come home in tears? Or when you shall have grown  
 To years of marriage, who—ah, who will be  
 The man to abide the hazard of disgrace  
 Such as must be the bane, both of my sons,  
 And you as well? For what reproach is lacking?  
 Your father slew his father, and became  
 Father of you—by her who bare him. So  
 Will they reproach you; who will wed you then?  
 No one, my children; but you needs must wither,

Barren—unwed. But thou, Menœceus' son,  
 Since thou art all the father these have left them,  
 For we, the two that were their parents, now  
 Are both undone, do not thou suffer them  
 To wander, vagabond and husband-less,  
 Being of thy kin; nor let them fall so low  
 As are my fortunes; but have pity on them,  
 Seeing them so tender, and so desolate  
 Of all friends, but for thee. Give me thy hand,  
 Good sir, and promise this.—To you, my girls,  
 If you were old enough to understand,  
 I should have much to say; but as it is,  
 This be your prayer; in some permitted place  
 That you may breathe; and have your lot in life  
 Happier than his, who did engender you.  
 CREON. Get thee in; thou hast bewailed thee enough, in reason.

ÆDIPUS. Though it be bitter, I must do it.

CREON. All's good, in good season.

ÆDIPUS. Do you know how to make me?

CREON. Say on, and I shall know.

ÆDIPUS. Banish me from this country.

CREON. That must the God bestow.

ÆDIPUS. But to Gods, above all men, I am a mark for hate.

CREON. And for that same reason you will obtain it straight.

ÆDIPUS. Say you so?

CREON. Yes truly, and I mean what I say.

ÆDIPUS. Lead me hence then, quickly.

CREON. Go; but let the children stay.

ÆDIPUS. Do not take them from me!

CREON. Think not to have all at thy pleasure;

For what thou didst attain to far outwent thy measure.

CREON, the Children, etc. retire. ÆDIPUS is led in.

CHORUS. Dwellers in Thebes, behold this Ædipus,

The man who solved the riddle marvellous,

A prince of men,

Whose lot what citizen

Did not with envy see,

How deep the billows of calamity

Above him roll.

Watch therefore and regard that supreme day;

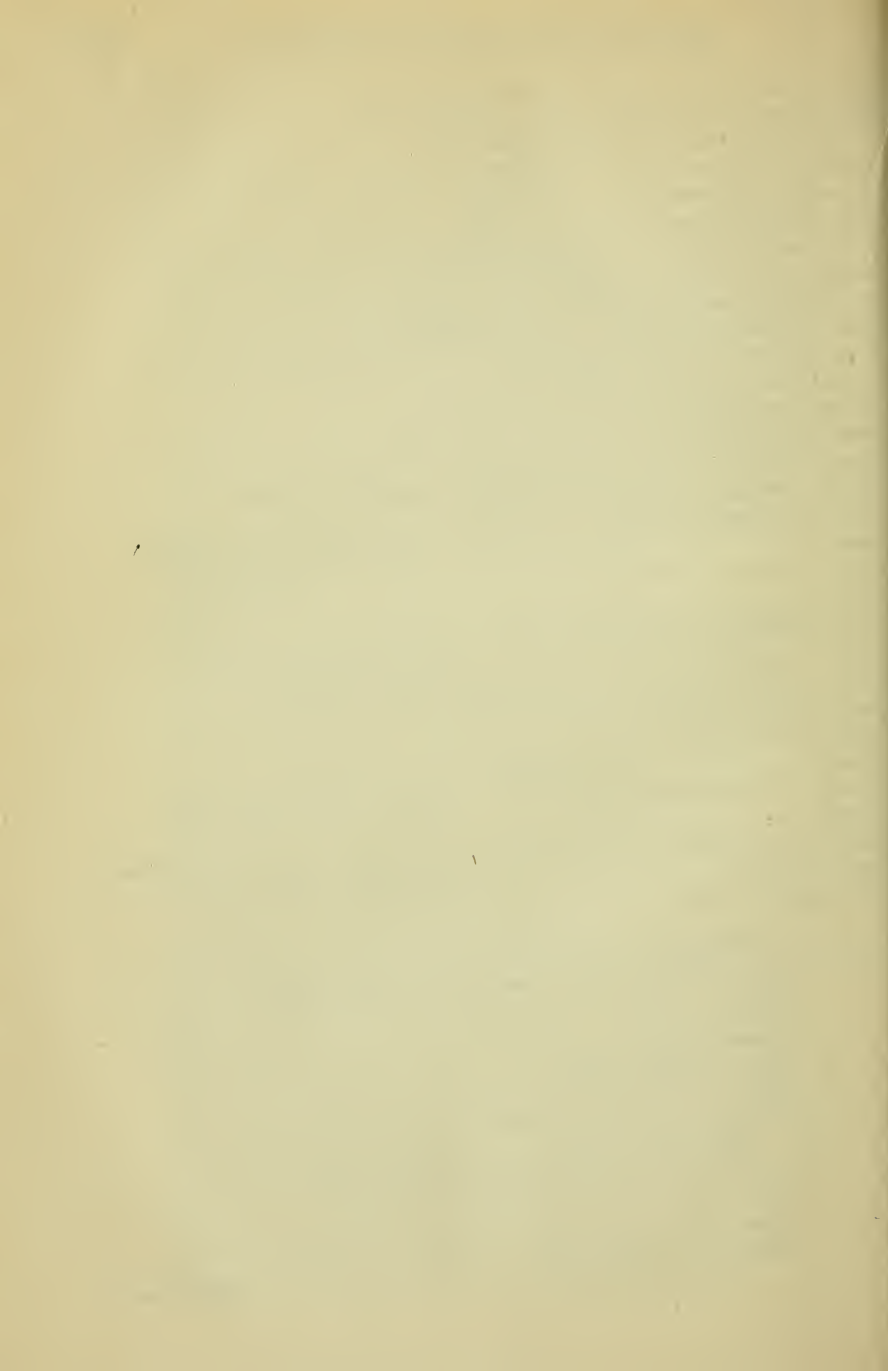
And of no mortal say

"That man is happy," till

Vexed by no grievous ill

He pass Life's goal.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]



# THE CYCLOPS

## A SATYRIC DRAMA

### PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

SILENUS.

ULYSSES.

CHORUS OF SATYRS.

THE CYCLOPS.

SILENUS. O Bacchus, what a world of toil, both now  
And ere these limbs were overworn with age,  
Have I endured for thee! First, when thou fled'st  
The mountain-nymphs who nurst thee, driven afar  
By the strange madness Juno sent upon thee;  
Then in the battle of the sons of Earth,  
When I stood foot by foot close to thy side,  
No unpropitious fellow-combatant,  
And driving through his shield my wingèd spear,  
Slew vast Enceladus. Consider now,  
Is it a dream of which I speak to thee?  
By Jove it is not, for you have the trophies!  
And now I suffer more than all before.  
For when I heard that Juno had devised  
A tedious voyage for you, I put to sea  
With all my children quaint in search of you,  
And I myself stood on the beakèd prow  
And fixed the naked mast, and all my boys  
Leaning upon their oars, with splash and strain  
Made white with foam the green and purple sea—  
And so we sought you, king. We were sailing  
Near Malea, when an eastern wind arose,  
And drove us to this wild Ætnean rock;  
The one-eyed children of the Ocean God,  
The man-destroying Cyclopes inhabit,  
On this wild shore, their solitary caves,  
And one of these, named Polypheme, has caught us  
To be his slaves; and so, for all delight  
Of Bacchic sports, sweet dance and melody,  
We keep this lawless giant's wandering flocks.  
My sons indeed, on far declivities,  
Young things themselves, tend on the youngling sheep,  
But I remain to fill the water casks,  
Or sweeping the hard floor, or ministering  
Some impious and abominable meal



To the fell Cyclops. I am wearied of it  
 And now I must scrape up the littered floor  
 With this great iron rake, so to receive  
 My absent master and his evening sheep  
 In a cave neat and clean. Even now I see  
 My children tending the flocks hitherward.  
 Ha! what is this? are your Sicinnian measures  
 Even now the same, as when with dance and song  
 You brought young Bacchus to Althæa's halls?

## STROPHE.

CHORUS OF SATYRS. Where has he of race divine  
 Wandered in the winding rocks?  
 Here the air is calm and fine  
 For the father of the flocks;—  
 Here the grass is soft and sweet,  
 And the river-eddies meet  
 In the trough beside the cave,  
 Bright as in their fountain wave.—  
 Neither here, nor on the dew  
 Of the lawny uplands feeding?  
 Oh, you come!—a stone at you  
 Will I throw to mend your breeding;—  
 Get along, you hornèd thing,  
 Wild, seditious, rambling!

## EPODE.

An Iacchic melody  
 To the golden Aphrodite  
 Will I lift, as erst did I  
 Seeking her and her delight,  
 With the Mænads, whose white feet  
 To the music glance and fleet.  
 Bacchus, O belovèd, where,  
 Shaking wide thy yellow hair,  
 Wanderest thou alone, afar?  
 To the one-eyed Cyclops, we,  
 Who by right thy servants are,  
 Minister in misery,  
 In these wretched goat-skins clad,  
 Far from thy delights and thee.

SILENUS. Be silent, sons; command the slaves to drive  
 The gathered flocks into the rock-roofed cave.

CHORUS. Go! But what needs this serious haste, O father?

SILENUS. I see a Grecian vessel on the coast,

And thence the rowers with some general  
 Approaching to this cave.—About their necks  
 Hang empty vessels, as they wanted food,  
 And water-flasks.—Oh miserable strangers!  
 Whence come they, that they know not what and who  
 My master is, approaching in ill hour  
 The inhospitable roof of Polypheme,  
 And the Cyclopiian jaw-bone, man-destroying?  
 Be silent, Satyrs, while I ask and hear  
 Whence coming, they arrive the Ætnean hill.

ULYSSES. Friends, can you show me some clear water spring,  
 The remedy of our thirst? Will any one  
 Furnish with food seamen in want of it?  
 Ha! what is this? We seem to be arrived  
 At the blithe court of Bacchus. I observe  
 This sportive band of Satyrs near the caves.  
 First let me greet the elder.—Hail!

SILENUS. Hail thou,  
 O Stranger! tell thy country and thy race.

ULYSSES. The Ithacan Ulysses and the king  
 Of Cephalonia.

SILENUS. Oh! I know the man,  
 Wordy and shrewd, the son of Sisyphus.

ULYSSES. I am the same, but do not rail upon me,—

SILENUS. Whence sailing do you come to Sicily?

ULYSSES. From Ilion, and from the Trojan toils.

SILENUS. How touched you not at your paternal shore?

ULYSSES. The strength of tempests bore me here by force.

SILENUS. The self-same accident occurred to me.

ULYSSES. Were you then driven here by stress of weather?

SILENUS. Following the Pirates who had kidnapped Bacchus.

ULYSSES. What land is this, and who inhabit it?—

SILENUS. Ætna, the loftiest peak in Sicily.

ULYSSES. And are there walls, and tower-surrounded towns?

SILENUS. There are not.—These lone rocks are bare of men.

ULYSSES. And who possess the land? the race of beasts?

SILENUS. Cyclops, who live in caverns, not in houses.

ULYSSES. Obeying whom? Or is the state popular?

SILENUS. Shepherds: no one obeys any in aught.

ULYSSES. How live they? do they sow the corn of Ceres?

SILENUS. On milk and cheese, and on the flesh of sheep.

ULYSSES. Have they the Bromian drink from the vine's stream?

SILENUS. Ah! no; they live in an ungracious land.

ULYSSES. And are they just to strangers?—hospitable?

SILENUS. They think the sweetest thing a stranger brings  
 Is his own flesh.

- ULYSSES. What! do they eat man's flesh?  
 SILENUS. No one comes here who is not eaten up.  
 ULYSSES. The Cyclops now—where is he? Not at home?  
 SILENUS. Absent on *Ætna*, hunting with his dogs.  
 ULYSSES. Know'st thou what thou must do to aid us hence?  
 SILENUS. I know not: we will help you all we can.  
 ULYSSES. Provide us food, of which we are in want.  
 SILENUS. Here is not anything, as I said, but meat.  
 ULYSSES. But meat is a sweet remedy for hunger.  
 SILENUS. Cow's milk there is, and store of curdled cheese.  
 ULYSSES. Bring out:—I would see all before I bargain.  
 SILENUS. But how much gold will you engage to give?  
 ULYSSES. I bring no gold, but Bacchic juice.  
 SILENUS. Oh joy!  
 'Tis long since these dry lips were wet with wine.  
 ULYSSES. Maron, the son of the god, gave it me.  
 SILENUS. Whom I have nursed a baby in my arms.  
 ULYSSES. The son of Bacchus, for your clearer knowledge.  
 SILENUS. Have you it now?—or is it in the ship?  
 ULYSSES. Old man, this skin contains it, which you see.  
 SILENUS. Why this would hardly be a mouthful for me.  
 ULYSSES. Nay, twice as much as you can draw from thence.  
 SILENUS. You speak of a fair fountain, sweet to me.  
 ULYSSES. Would you first taste of the unmingled wine?  
 SILENUS. 'Tis just—tasting invites the purchaser.  
 ULYSSES. Here is the cup, together with the skin.  
 SILENUS. Pour: that the draught may fillip my remembrance.  
 ULYSSES. See!  
 SILENUS. Papaiax! what a sweet smell it has!  
 ULYSSES. You see it then?—  
 SILENUS. By Jove, no? but I smell it.  
 ULYSSES. Taste, that you may not praise it in words only.  
 SILENUS. Babai! Great Bacchus calls me forth to dance!  
 Joy! Joy!  
 ULYSSES. Did it flow sweetly down your throat?  
 SILENUS. So that it tingled to my very nails.  
 ULYSSES. And in addition I will give you gold.  
 SILENUS. Let gold alone! only unlock the cask.  
 ULYSSES. Bring out some cheeses now, or a young goat.  
 SILENUS. That will I do, despising any master.  
 Yes, let me drink one cup, and I will give  
 All that the Cyclops feed upon their mountains.  
 CHORUS. Ye have taken Troy and laid your hands on Helen?  
 ULYSSES. And utterly destroyed the race of Priam.  
 SILENUS. The wanton wretch! she was bewitched to see  
 The many-coloured anklets and the chain

Of woven gold which girt the neck of Paris,  
 And so she left that good man Menelaus.  
 There should be no more women in the world  
 But such as are reserved for me alone.—  
 See, here are sheep, and here are goats, Ulysses,  
 Here are unsparing cheeses of pressed milk;  
 Take them; depart with what good speed ye may;  
 First leaving my reward, the Bacchic dew  
 Of joy-inspiring grapes.

ULYSSES. Ah me! Alas!

What shall we do? the Cyclops is at hand!

Old man, we perish! whither can we fly?

SILENUS. Hide yourselves quick within that hollow rock.

ULYSSES. 'Twere perilous to fly into the net.

SILENUS. The cavern has recesses numberless;

Hide yourself quick.

ULYSSES. That will I never do!

The mighty Troy would be indeed disgraced

If I should fly one man. How many times

Have I withstood, with shield immovable,

Ten thousand Phrygians!—if I needs must die,

Yet will I die with glory;—if I live,

The praise which I have gained will yet remain.

SILENUS. What, ho! assistance, comrades, haste, assistance!

THE CYCLOPS, SILENUS, ULYSSES, CHORUS.

CYCLOPS. What is this tumult? Bacchus is not here,

Nor tympanies nor brazen castanets.

How are my young lambs in the cavern? Milking

Their dams or playing by their sides? And is

The new cheese pressed into the bulrush baskets?

Speak! I'll beat some of you till you rain tears—

Look up, not downwards, when I speak to you.

SILENUS. See! I now gape at Jupiter himself,

I stare upon Orion and the stars.

CYCLOPS. Well, is the dinner fitly cooked and laid?

SILENUS. All ready, if your throat is ready too.

CYCLOPS. Are the bowls full of milk besides?

SILENUS.

O'er-brimming;

So you may drink a tunful if you will.

CYCLOPS. Is it ewe's milk or cow's milk, or both mixed?—

SILENUS. Both, either; only pray don't swallow me.

CYCLOPS. By no means——

What is this crowd I see beside the stalls?

Outlaws or thieves? for near my cavern-home,

I see my young lambs coupled two by two

With willow bands; mixed with my cheeses lie  
 Their implements; and this old fellow here  
 Has his bald head broken with stripes.

SILENUS.

Ah me!

I have been beaten till I burn with fever.

CYCLOPS. By whom? Who laid his fist upon your head?

SILENUS. Those men, because I would not suffer them  
 To steal your goods.

CYCLOPS. Did not the rascals know

I am a god, sprung from the race of heaven?

SILENUS. I told them so, but they bore off your things,

And ate the cheese in spite of all I said,

And carried out the lambs—and said, moreover,

They'd pin you down with a three-cubit collar,

And pull your vitals out through your one eye,

Torture your back with stripes, then binding you,

Throw you as ballast into the ship's hold,

And then deliver you, a slave, to move

Enormous rocks, or found a vestibule.

CYCLOPS. In truth? Nay, haste, and place in order quickly

The cooking knives, and heap upon the hearth,

And kindle it, a great faggot of wood—

As soon as they are slaughtered, they shall fill

My belly, broiling warm from the live coals,

Or boiled and seethed within the bubbling cauldron.

I am quite sick of the wild mountain game,

Of stags and lions I have gorged enough,

And I grow hungry for the flesh of men.

SILENUS. Nay, master, something new is very pleasant

After one thing for ever, and of late

Very few strangers have approached our cave.

ULYSSES. Hear, Cyclops, a plain tale on the other side.

We, wanting to buy food, came from our ship

Into the neighbourhood of your cave, and here

This old Silenus gave us in exchange

These lambs for wine, the which he took and drank,

And all by mutual compact, without force.

There is no word of truth in what he says,

For silyly he was selling all your store.

SILENUS. I? May you perish, wretch—

ULYSSES.

If I speak false!

SILENUS. Cyclops, I swear by Neptune who begot thee,

By mighty Triton and by Nereus old,

Calypso and the glaucous ocean Nymphs,

The sacred waves and all the race of fishes—

Be these the witnesses, my dear sweet master,



And weapon-wingèd murder heaped togethe  
Enough of dead, and wives are husbandless,



And ancient women and gray fathers wail  
 Their childless age;—if you should roast the rest  
 And 'tis a bitter feast that you prepare,  
 Where then would any turn? Yet be persuaded  
 Forego the lust of your jaw-bone; prefer  
 Pious humanity to wicked will:  
 Many have bought too dear their evil joys.  
 SILENUS. Let me advise you, do not spare a morsel  
 Of all his flesh. If you should eat his tongue  
 You would become most eloquent, O Cyclops.  
 CYCLOPS. Wealth, my good fellow, is the wise man's god,  
 All other things are a pretence and boast.  
 What are my father's ocean promontories,  
 The sacred rocks whereon he dwells, to me?  
 Stranger, I laugh to scorn Jove's thunderbolt,  
 I know not that his strength is more than mine.  
 As to the rest I care not:—When he pours  
 Rain from above, I have a close pavilion  
 Under this rock, in which I lie supine,  
 Feasting on a roast calf or some wild beast,  
 And drinking pans of milk, and gloriously  
 Emulating the thunder of high heaven.  
 And when the Thracian wind pours down the snow,  
 I wrap my body in the skins of beasts,  
 Kindle a fire, and bid the snow whirl on.  
 The earth, by force, whether it will or no,  
 Bringing forth grass, fattens my flocks and herds,  
 Which, to what other god but to myself  
 And this great belly, first of deities,  
 Should I be bound to sacrifice? I well know  
 The wise man's only Jupiter is this,  
 To eat and drink during his little day,  
 And give himself no care. And as for those  
 Who complicate with laws the life of man,  
 I freely give them tears for their reward.  
 I will not cheat my soul of its delight,  
 Or hesitate in dining upon you:—  
 And that I may be quit of all demands,  
 These are my hospitable gifts;—fierce fire  
 And yon ancestral cauldron, which o'erbubbling  
 Shall finely cook your miserable flesh.  
 Creep in!—  
 ULYSSES. Ai! ai! I have escaped the Trojan toils,  
 I have escaped the sea, and now I fall  
 Under the cruel grasp of one impious man.  
 O Pallas, mistress, goddess, sprung from Jove,

Now, now, assist me! Mightier toils than Troy  
Are these;—I totter on the chasms of peril;—  
And thou who inhabitest the thrones  
Of the bright stars, look, hospitable Jove,  
Upon this outrage of thy deity,  
Otherwise be considered as no god!

CHORUS (*alone*).

For your gaping gulph, and your gullet wide  
The ravin is ready on every side,  
The limbs of the strangers are cooked and done,  
There is boiled meat, and roast meat, and meat  
from the coal,

You may chop it, and tear it, and gnash it for fun,  
An hairy goat's-skin contains the whole.

Let me but escape, and ferry me o'er  
The stream of your wrath to a safer shore.  
The Cyclops Ætnean is cruel and bold,

He murders the strangers  
That sit on his hearth,  
And dreads no avengers  
To rise from the earth.

He roasts the men before they are cold,  
He snatches them broiling from the coal,  
And from the cauldron pulls them whole,  
And minces their flesh and gnaws their bone  
With his cursèd teeth, till all be gone.

Farewell, foul pavilion:

Farewell, rites of dread!

The Cyclops vermilion,  
With slaughter uncloying,

Now feasts on the dead,  
In the flesh of strangers joying!

ULYSSES. O Jupiter! I saw within the cave  
Horrible things; deeds to be feigned in words,  
But not to be believed as being done.

CHORUS. What! sawest thou the impious Polypheme  
Feasting upon your loved companions now?

ULYSSES. Selecting two, the plumpest of the crowd,  
He grasped them in his hands.—

CHORUS.

Unhappy man!

ULYSSES. Soon as we came into this craggy place,  
Kindling a fire, he cast on the broad hearth  
The knotty limbs of an enormous oak,  
Three waggon-loads at least, and then he strewed

Upon the ground, beside the red firelight,  
His couch of pine leaves; and he milked the cows,  
And pouring forth the white milk, filled a bowl  
Three cubits wide and four in depth, as much  
As would contain ten amphoræ, and bound it  
With ivy wreaths; then placed upon the fire  
A brazen pot to boil, and made red hot  
The points of spits, not sharpened with the sickle  
But with a fruit tree bough, and with the jaws  
Of axes for Ætnean slaughterings.  
And when this god-abandoned cook of hell  
Had made all ready, he seized two of us  
And killed them in a kind of measured manner;  
For he flung one against the brazen rivets  
Of the huge cauldron, and seized the other  
By the foot's tendon, and knocked out his brains  
Upon the sharp edge of the craggy stone:  
Then peeled his flesh with a great cooking-knife  
And put him down to roast. The other's limbs  
He chopped into the cauldron to be boiled.  
And I, with the tears raining from my eyes,  
Stood near the Cyclops, ministering to him;  
The rest, in the recesses of the cave,  
Clung to the rock like bats, bloodless with fear.  
When he was filled with my companions' flesh,  
He threw himself upon the ground and sent  
A loathsome exhalation from his maw.  
Then a divine thought came to me. I filled  
The cup of Maron, and I offered him  
To taste, and said:—"Child of the Ocean God,  
Behold what drink the vines of Greece produce,  
The exultation and the joy of Bacchus."  
He, satiated with his unnatural food,  
Received it, and at one draught drank it off,  
And taking my hand, praised me:—"Thou hast given  
A sweet draught after a sweet meal, dear guest."  
And I perceiving that it pleased him, filled  
Another cup, well knowing that the wine  
Would wound him soon and take a sure revenge.  
And the charm fascinated him, and I  
Plied him cup after cup, until the drink  
Had warmed his entrails, and he sang aloud  
In concert with my wailing fellow-seamen  
A hideous discord—and the cavern rung.  
I have stolen out, so that if you will  
You may achieve my safety and your own.

But say, do you desire, or not, to fly  
 This uncompanionable man, and dwell  
 As was your wont among the Grecian Nymphs  
 Within the fanes of your belovèd god?  
 Your father there within agrees to it,  
 But he is weak and overcome with wine,  
 And caught as if with bird-lime by the cup,  
 He claps his wings and crows in doting joy.  
 You who are young escape with me, and find  
 Bacchus your ancient friend; unsuited he  
 To this rude Cyclops.

CHORUS. Oh my dearest friend,  
 That I could see that day, and leave for ever  
 The impious Cyclops.

ULYSSES. Listen then what a punishment I have  
 For this fell monster, how secure a flight  
 From your hard servitude.

CHORUS. O sweeter far  
 Than is the music of an Asian lyre  
 Would be the news of Polypheme destroyed.  
 ULYSSES. Delighted with the Bacchic drink he goes  
 To call his brother Cyclops—who inhabit  
 A village upon Ætna not far off.

CHORUS. I understand, catching him when alone  
 You think by some measure to dispatch him,  
 Or thrust him from the precipice.

ULYSSES. Oh no;  
 Nothing of that kind; my device is subtle.

CHORUS. How then? I heard of old that thou wert wise.

ULYSSES. I will dissuade him from this plan, by saying  
 It were unwise to give the Cyclopes  
 This precious drink, which if enjoyed alone  
 Would make life sweeter for a longer time.  
 When vanquished by the Bacchic power, he sleeps,  
 There is a trunk of olive wood within,  
 Whose point having made sharp with this good sword  
 I will conceal in fire, and when I see  
 It is alight, will fix it, burning yet,  
 Within the socket of the Cyclops' eye  
 And melt it out with fire—as when a man  
 Turns by its handle a great augur round,  
 Fitting the framework of a ship with beams,  
 So will I, in the Cyclops' fiery eye  
 Turn round the brand and dry the pupil up.  
 CHORUS. Joy! I am mad with joy at your device.  
 ULYSSES. And then with you, my friends, and the old man,

We'll load the hollow depth of our black ship,  
And row with double strokes from this dread shore.

CHORUS. May I, as in libations to a god,  
Share in the blinding him with the red brand?  
I would have some communion in his death.

ULYSSES. Doubtless; the brand is a great brand to hold.

CHORUS. Oh! I would lift an hundred waggon-loads,  
If like a wasp's nest I could scoop the eye out  
Of the detested Cyclops.

ULYSSES. Silence now!  
Ye know the close device—and when I call,  
Look ye obey the masters of the craft.  
I will not save myself and leave behind  
My comrades in the cave: I might escape,  
Having got clear from that obscure recess,  
But 'twere unjust to leave in jeopardy  
The dear companions who sailed here with me.

CHORUS. Come! who is first, that with his hand  
Will urge down the burning brand  
Through the lids, and quench and pierce  
The Cyclops' eye so fiery fierce?

*Semichorus I. (Song within.)*

Listen! Listen! he is coming,  
A most hideous discord humming,  
Drunken, museless, awkward, yelling,  
Far along his rocky dwelling;  
Let us with some comic spell  
Teach the yet unteachable.  
By all means he must be blinded  
If my council be but minded.

*Semichorus II..*

Happy those made odorous  
With the dew which sweet grapes weep,  
To the village hastening thus,  
Seek the vines that soothe to sleep,  
Having first embraced thy friend,  
There in luxury without end,  
With the strings of yellow hair,  
Of thy voluptuous leman fair,  
Shalt sit playing on a bed!—  
Speak what door is openèd?

CYCLOPS. Ha! ha! ha! I'm full of wine,  
Heavy with the joy divine,

With the young feast oversated,  
 Like a merchant's vessel freighted  
 To the water's edge, my crop  
 Is laden to the gullet's top.  
 The fresh meadow grass of spring  
 Tempts me forth thus wandering  
 To my brothers on the mountains,  
 Who shall share the wine's sweet fountains.  
 Bring the cask, O stranger, bring!

CHORUS. One with eyes the fairest  
 Cometh from his dwelling  
 Some one loves thee, rarest,  
 Bright beyond my telling.  
 In thy grace thou shinest  
 Like some nymph divinest,  
 In her caverns dewy:—  
 All delights pursue thee,  
 Soon pied flowers, sweet-breathing,  
 Shall thy head be wreathing.

ULYSSES. Listen, O Cyclops, for I am well skilled  
 In Bacchus, whom I gave thee of to drink.

CYCLOPS. What sort of god is Bacchus then accounted?

ULYSSES. The greatest among men for joy of life.

CYCLOPS. I gulped him down with very great delight.

ULYSSES. This is a god who never injures men.

CYCLOPS. How does the god like living in a skin?

ULYSSES. He is content wherever he is put.

CYCLOPS. Gods should not have their body in a skin.

ULYSSES. If he gives joy, what is his skin to you?

CYCLOPS. I hate the skin, but love the wine within.

ULYSSES. Stay here, now drink, and make your spirit glad.

CYCLOPS. Should I not share this liquour with my brothers?

ULYSSES. Keep it yourself, and be more honoured so.

CYCLOPS. I were more useful, giving to my friends.

ULYSSES. But village mirth breeds contests, broils, and blows.

CYCLOPS. When I am drunk none shall lay hands on me.—

ULYSSES. A drunken man is better within doors.

CYCLOPS. He is a fool, who drinking, loves not mirth.

ULYSSES. But he is wise, who drunk, remains at home.

CYCLOPS. What shall I do, Silenus? Shall I stay?

SILENUS. Stay—for what need have you of pot companions?

CYCLOPS. Indeed this place is closely carpeted  
 With flowers and grass.

SILENUS. And in the sun-warm noon



'Tis sweet to drink. Lie down beside me now,  
 Placing your mighty sides upon the ground.  
 CYCLOPS. What do you put the cup behind me for?  
 SILENUS. That no one here may touch it.

CYCLOPS. Thievish one!

You want to drink;—here place it in the midst.

And thou, O stranger, tell how art thou called?

ULYSSES. My name is Nobody. What favour now

Shall I receive to praise you at your hands?

CYCLOPS. I'll feast on you the last of your companions.

ULYSSES. You grant your guest a fair reward, O Cyclops.

CYCLOPS. Ha! what is this? Stealing the wine, you rogue!

SILENUS. It was this stranger kissing me because  
 I looked so beautiful.

CYCLOPS. You shall repent

For kissing the coy wine that loves you not.

SILENUS. By Jupiter! you said that I am fair.

CYCLOPS. Pour out, and only give me the cup full.

SILENUS. How is it mixed? let me observe.

CYCLOPS. Curse you!

Give it me so.

SILENUS. Not till I see you wear

That coronal, and taste the cup to you.

CYCLOPS. Thou wily traitor!

SILENUS. But the wine is sweet.

Ay, you will roar if you are caught in drinking.

CYCLOPS. See now, my lip is clean and all my beard.

SILENUS. Now put your elbow right and drink again.

As you see me drink—

CYCLOPS. How now?

SILENUS. Ye gods, what a delicious gulp!

CYCLOPS. Guest, take it;—you pour out the wine for me.

ULYSSES. The wine is well accustomed to my hand.

CYCLOPS. Pour out the wine!

ULYSSES. I pour; only be silent.

CYCLOPS. Silence is a hard task to him who drinks.

ULYSSES. Take it and drink it off; leave not a dreg.

Oh, that the drinker died with his own draught!

CYCLOPS. Papai! the vine must be a sapient plant.

ULYSSES. If you drink much after a mighty feast,

Moistening your thirsty maw, you will sleep well;

If you leave aught, Bacchus will dry you up.

CYCLOPS. Ho! ho! I can scarce rise. What pure delight!

The heavens and earth appear to whirl about

Confusedly. I see the throne of Jove

And the clear congregation of the gods.

Now if the Graces tempted me to kiss  
I would not, for the loveliest of them all  
I would not leave this Ganymede.

SILENUS. Polypheme,

I am the Ganymede of Jupiter.

CYCLOPS. By Jove you are; I bore you off from Dardanus.

ULYSSES *and the* CHORUS.

ULYSSES. Come, boys of Bacchus, children of high race,  
This man within is folded up in sleep,  
And soon will vomit flesh from his fell maw;  
The brand under the shed thrusts out its smoke,  
No preparation needs, but to burn out  
The monster's eye;—but bear yourselves like men.

CHORUS. We will have courage like the adamant rock,  
All things are ready for you here; go in,  
Before our father shall perceive the noise.

ULYSSES. Vulcan, Ætnean king! burn out with fire  
The shining eye of this thy neighbouring monster!  
And thou, O sleep, nursling of gloomy night,  
Descend unmixed on this god-hated beast,  
And suffer not Ulysses and his comrades,  
Returning from their famous Trojan toils,  
To perish by this man, who cares not either  
For god or mortal; or I needs must think  
That Chance is a supreme divinity,  
And things divine are subject to her power.

CHORUS. Soon a crab the throat will seize  
Of him who feeds upon his guest,  
Fire will burn his lamp-like eye  
In revenge of such a feast!

A great oak stump now is lying  
In the ashes yet undying.

Come, Maron, come!  
Raging let him fix the doom,  
Let him tear the eyelid up  
Of the Cyclops—that his cup  
May be evil!

Oh! I long to dance and revel  
With sweet Bromian, long desired,  
In loved ivy wreaths attired;  
Leaving this abandoned home—  
Will the moment ever come?

ULYSSES. Be silent, ye wild things! Nay, hold your peace,  
And keep your lips quite close; dare not to breathe,

Or spit, or e'en wink, lest ye wake the monster,  
Until his eye be tortured out with fire.

CHORUS. Nay, we are silent, and we chaw the air.

ULYSSES. Come now, and lend a hand to the great stake  
Within—it is delightfully red hot.

CHORUS. You then command who first should seize the stake  
To burn the Cyclops' eye, that all may share  
In the great enterprise.

SEMI. I. We are too far,  
We cannot at this distance from the door  
Thrust fire into his eye.

SEMI. II. And we just now  
Have become lame; cannot move hand or foot.

CHORUS. The same thing has occurred to us,—our ankles  
Are sprained with standing here, I know not how.

ULYSSES. What, sprained with standing still?

CHORUS. And there is dust  
Or ashes in our eyes, I know not whence.

ULYSSES. Cowardly dogs! ye will not aid me then?

CHORUS. With pitying my own back and my back bone,  
And with not wishing all my teeth knocked out,  
This cowardice comes of itself—but stay,

I know a famous Orphic incantation  
To make the brand stick of its own accord  
Into the skull of this one-eyed son of Earth.

ULYSSES. Of old I knew ye thus by nature; now  
I know ye better.—I will use the aid

Of my own comrades—yet though weak of hand  
Speak cheerfully, that so ye may awaken  
The courage of my friends with your blithe words.

CHORUS. This I will do with peril of my life,  
And blind you with my exhortations, Cyclops.

Hasten and thrust,  
And parch up to dust,  
The eye of the beast,  
Who feeds on his guest.  
Burn and blind  
The Ætnean hind!  
Scoop and draw,  
But beware lest he claw  
Your limbs near his maw.

CYCLOPS. Ah me! my eyesight is parched up to cinders.

CHORUS. What a sweet pæan! sing me that again!

CYCLOPS. Ah me! indeed, what woe has fallen upon me!

But wretched nothings, think ye not to flee  
Out of this rock; I, standing at the outlet,  
Will bar the way and catch you as you pass.

CHORUS. What are you roaring out, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS. I perish!

CHORUS. For you are wicked.

CYCLOPS. And besides miserable.

CHORUS. What, did you fall into the fire when drunk?

CYCLOPS. 'Twas Nobody destroyed me.

CHORUS. Why then no one

Can be to blame.

CYCLOPS. I say 'twas Nobody

Who blinded me.

CHORUS. Why then you are not blind.

CYCLOPS. I wish you were as blind as I am.

CHORUS. Nay,

It cannot be that no one made you blind.

CYCLOPS. You jeer me; where, I ask, is Nobody?

CHORUS. Nowhere, O Cyclops.

CYCLOPS. It was that stranger ruined me:—the wretch

First gave me wine and then burnt out my eye,

For wine is strong and hard to struggle with.

Have they escaped, or are they yet within?

CHORUS. They stand under the darkness of the rock

And cling to it.

CYCLOPS. At my right hand or left?

CHORUS. Close on your right.

CYCLOPS. Where?

CHORUS. Near the rock itself.

You have them.

CYCLOPS. Oh, misfortune on misfortune!

I've cracked my skull.

CHORUS. Now they escape you there.

CYCLOPS. Not there, although you say so.

CHORUS. Not on that side.

CYCLOPS. Where then?

CHORUS. They creep about you on your left.

CYCLOPS. Ah! I am mocked! They jeer me in my ills.

CHORUS. Not there! he is a little there beyond you.

CYCLOPS. Detested wretch! where are you?

ULYSSES. Far from you

I keep with care this body of Ulysses.

CYCLOPS. What do you say? You proffer a new name.

ULYSSES. My father named me so; and I have taken

A full revenge for your unnatural feast;

I should have done ill to have burned down Troy

And not revenged the murder of my comrades.

CYCLOPS. Ai! ai! the ancient oracle is accomplished;

It said that I should have my eyesight blinded

By you coming from Troy, yet it foretold

That you should pay the penalty for this

By wandering long over the homeless sea.

ULYSSES. I bid thee weep—consider what I say,

I go towards the shore to drive my ship

To mine own land, o'er the Sicilian wave.

CYCLOPS. Not so, if whelming you with this huge stone

I can crush you and all your men together;

I will descend upon the shore, though blind,

Groping my way adown the steep ravine.

CHORUS. And we, the shipmates of Ulysses now,

Will serve our Bacchus all our happy lives.

# IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

IPHIGENIA.

THOAS.

ORESTES.

HERDSMAN.

PYLADES.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS of GRECIAN WOMEN, CAPTIVES, ATTENDANTS *in the Temple.*

IPHIGENIA. To Pisa by the fleetest coursers borne  
Comes Pelops, son of Tantalus, and weds  
The virgin daughter of CEnomaus:  
From her sprung Atreus; Menelaus from him,  
And Agamemnon; I from him derive  
My birth, his Iphigenia, by his queen  
Daughter of Tyndarus. Where frequent winds  
Swell the vext Euripus with eddying blasts,  
And roll the dark'ning waves, my father slew me  
A victim to Diana, so he thought,  
For Helen's sake, its bay where Aulis winds  
To fame well known, for there his thousand ships,  
Th' armament of Greece, th' imperial chief  
Convened, desirous that his Greeks should snatch  
The glorious crown of victory from Troy,  
And punish the base insult to the bed  
Of Helen, vengeance grateful to the soul  
Of Menelaus. But 'gainst his ships the sea  
Long barred, and not one fav'ring breeze to swell  
His flagging sails, the hallowed flames the chief  
Consults, and Calchas thus disclosed the fates:  
"Imperial leader of the Grecian host,  
Hence shalt thou not unmoor thy vessels ere  
Diana as a victim shall receive  
Thy daughter Iphigenia. What the year  
Most beauteous should produce, thou to the queen  
Dispensing light didst vow to sacrifice:  
A daughter Clytemnestra in thy house  
Then bore (the peerless grace of beauty thus  
To me assigning): her must thou devote  
The victim." Then Ulysses by his arts  
Me, to Achilles as designed a bride,  
Won from my mother. My unhappy fate



To Aulis brought me; on the altar there  
High was I placed, and o'er me gleamed the sword  
Aiming the fatal wound: but from the stroke  
Diana snatched me, in exchange a hind  
Giving the Grecians; through the lucid air  
Me she conveyed to Tauris, here to dwell,  
Where o'er barbarians a barbaric king  
Holds his rude sway, named Thoas, whose swift foot  
Equals the rapid wing: me he appoints  
The priestess of this temple, where such rites  
Are pleasing to Diana, that the name  
Alone claims honour; for I sacrifice  
(Such, ere I came, the custom of the state)  
Whatever Grecian to this savage shore  
Is driven. The previous rites are mine; the deed  
Of blood, too horrid to be told, devolves  
On others in the temple; but the rest,  
In reverence to the goddess, I forbear.  
But the strange visions, which the night now past  
Brought with it, to the air, if that may soothe  
My troubled thought, I will relate. I seemed,  
As I lay sleeping, from this land removed  
To dwell at Argos, resting on my couch  
'Midst the apartments of the virgin train.  
Sudden the firm earth shook; I fled, and stood  
Without; the battlements I saw, and all  
The rocking roof fall from its lofty height  
In ruins to the ground; of all the house,  
My father's house, one pillar, as I thought,  
Alone was left, which from its cornice waved  
A length of auburn-locks, and human voice  
Assumed. The bloody office, which is mine  
To strangers here, respecting, I to death,  
Sprinkling the lustral drops, devoted it  
With many tears. My dream I thus expound.  
Orestes, whom I hallowed by my rites,  
Is dead: for sons are pillars of the house,  
They, whom my lustral lavers sprinkle, die.  
I cannot to my friends apply my dream,  
For Strophius, when I perished, had no son.  
Now to my brother, absent though he be,  
Libations will I offer; this at least,  
With the attendants given me by the king,  
Virgins of Greece, I can: but what the cause  
They yet attend me not within the house,  
The temple of the goddess where I dwell?

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES. Keep careful watch, lest some one come this way.

PYLADES. I watch, and turn mine eye to every part.

ORESTES. And dost thou, Pylades, imagine this

The temple of the goddess which we seek,

Our sails from Argos sweeping o'er the main?

PYLADES. Orestes, such my thought, and must be thine.

ORESTES. And this the altar wet with Grecian blood?

PYLADES. Crimsoned with gore behold its sculptured wreaths.

ORESTES. See, from the battlements what trophies hang!

PYLADES. The spoils of strangers that have here been slain.

ORESTES. Behoves us then to watch with careful eye.

O Phœbus, by thy oracles again

Why hast thou led me to these toils? E'er since

In vengeance for my father's blood I slew

My mother, ceaseless by the Furies driven,

Vagrant, an outcast, many a bending course

My feet have trod: to thee I came, of thee

Inquired this whirling frenzy by what means,

And by what means my labours I might end.

Thy voice commanded me to speed my course

To this wild coast of Tauris, where a shrine

Thy sister hath, Diana; thence to take

The statue of the goddess, which from heaven,

So say the natives, to this temple fell:

This image or by fraud or fortune won,

The dangerous toil achieved, to place the prize

In the Athenian land: no more was said;

But that performing this I should obtain

Rest from my toils. Obedient to thy words

On this unknown, inhospitable coast

Am I arrived. Now, Pylades, for thou

Art my associate in this dangerous task,

Of thee I ask, What shall we do? for high

The walls, thou seest, which fence the temple round:

Shall we ascend their height? But how escape

Observing eyes? Or burst the brazen bars?

Of these we nothing know. In the attempt

To force the gates, or meditating means

To enter, if detected, we shall die.

Shall we then, ere we die, by flight regain

The ship, in which we hither ploughed the sea?

PYLADES. Of flight we brook no thought, nor such hath been

Our wont; nor may the god's commanding voice

Be disobeyed: but from the temple now

Retiring, in some cave, which the black sea  
 Beats with its billows, we may lie concealed  
 At distance from our bark, lest some, whose eyes  
 May note it, bear the tidings to the king,  
 And we be seized by force. But when the eye  
 Of night comes darkling on, then must we dare,  
 And take the polished image from the shrine,  
 Attempting all things: and the vacant space  
 Between the triglyphs, mark it well, enough  
 Is open to admit us; by that way  
 Attempt we to descend. In toils the brave  
 Are daring; of no worth the abject soul.  
 ORESTES. This length of sea we ploughed not from this coast,  
 Nothing effected, to return: but well  
 Hast thou advised; the god must be obeyed.  
 Retire we then where we may lie concealed:  
 For never from the god will come the cause  
 That what his sacred voice commands should fall  
 Effectless. We must dare. No toil to youth  
 Excuse, which justifies inaction, brings.

IPHIGENIA, CHORUS.

IPHIG. You, who your savage dwellings hold  
 Nigh this inhospitable main,  
 'Gainst clashing rocks with fury rolled,  
 From all but hallowed words abstain.  
 Virgin queen, Latona's grace,  
 Joying in the mountain chase,  
 To thy court, thy rich domain,  
 To thy beauteous-pillared fane,  
 Where our wond'ring eyes behold  
 Battlements that blaze with gold,  
 Thus my virgin steps I bend,  
 Holy, the holy to attend,  
 Servant, virgin queen, to thee,  
 Power, who bearest life's golden key,  
 Far from Greece for steeds renowned,  
 From her walls with towers crowned,  
 From the beauteous-planted meads  
 Where his train Eurotas leads,  
 Visiting the loved retreats  
 Once my royal father's seats.

CHORUS. I come. What cares disturb thy rest?  
 Why hast thou brought me to the shrine?  
 Doth some fresh grief afflict thy breast?

Why bring me to this seat divine?  
Thou daughter of that chief, whose powers  
Ploughed with a thousand keels the strand,  
And ranged in arms shook Troy's proud towers  
Beneath th' Atridæ's great command!

IPHIG. O ye attendant train,  
How is my heart oppressed with woe!  
What notes, save notes of grief, can flow,  
A harsh and unmelodious strain?  
My soul domestic ills oppress with dread,  
And bid me mourn a brother dead.  
What visions did my sleeping sense appal  
In the past dark and midnight hour?  
'Tis ruin, ruin all.  
My father's house—it is no more;  
No more is his illustrious line.  
What dreadful deeds hath Argos known!  
One only brother, Fate, was mine;  
And dost thou rend him from me? Is he gone  
To Pluto's dreary realms below?  
For him, as dead, with pious care  
This goblet I prepare;  
And on the bosom of the earth shall flow  
Streams from the heifer mountain-bred,  
The grape's rich juice, and mixed with these  
The labour of the yellow bees,  
Libations soothing to the dead.  
Give me th' oblation; let me hold  
The foaming goblet's hallowed gold.  
O thou, the earth beneath,  
Who didst from Agamemnon spring,  
To thee deprived of vital breath  
I these libations bring.  
Accept them: to thy honoured tomb  
Never, ah! never shall I come;  
Never these golden tresses bear  
To place them there, there shed the tear:  
For from my country far, a hind  
There deemed as slain, my wild abode I find.  
CHORUS. To thee thy faithful train  
The Asiatic hymn will raise,  
A doleful, a barbaric strain,  
Responsive to thy lays,  
And steep in tears the mournful song,  
Notes which to the dead belong,

Dismal notes attuned to woe  
 By Pluto in the realms below:  
 No sprightly air shall we employ  
 To cheer the soul, and wake the sense of joy.  
 IPHIG. Th' Atridæ are no more:  
 Extinct their sceptre's golden light;  
 My father's house from its proud height  
 Is fall'n: its ruins I deplore.  
 Who of her kings at Argos holds his reign,  
 Her kings once blest? But Sorrow's train  
 Rolls on impetuous for the rapid steeds  
 Which o'er the strand with Pelops fly.  
 From what atrocious deeds  
 Starts the sun back, his sacred eye  
 Of brightness, loathing, turned aside?  
 And fatal to their house arose  
 From the rich Ram, Thessalia's golden pride,  
 Slaughter on slaughter, woes on woes.  
 Thence from the dead of ages past  
 Vengeance came rushing on its prey,  
 And swept the race of Tantalus away:  
 Fatal to thee its ruthless haste;  
 To me too fatal from the hour  
 My mother wedded, from the night  
 She gave me to life's opening light,  
 Nursed by affliction's cruel power.  
 Early to me the fates unkind  
 To know what sorrow is assigned;  
 Me, Leda's daughter, hapless dame,  
 First blooming offspring of her bed  
 (A father's conduct here I blame),  
 A joyless victim bred;  
 When o'er the strand of Aulis, in the pride  
 Of beauty kindling flames of love,  
 High on my splendid car I move,  
 Betrothed to Thetis' son a bride:  
 Ah hapless bride, to all the train  
 Of Grecian fair preferred in vain!  
 But now a stranger on this strand,  
 'Gainst which the wild waves beat,  
 I hold my dreary, joyless seat,  
 Far distant from my native land;  
 Nor nuptial bed is mine, nor child, nor friend.  
 At Argos now no more I raise  
 The festal song in Juno's praise;  
 Nor o'er the loom sweet-sounding bend,

As the creative shuttle flies,  
 Give forms of Titans fierce to rise,  
 And dreadful with her purple spear  
 Image Athenian Pallas there.  
 But on this barb'rous shore  
 Th' unhappy stranger's fate I moan,  
 The ruthless altar stained with gore,  
 His deep and dying groan:  
 And for each tear that weeps his woes,  
 From me a tear of pity flows.  
 Of these the sad remembrance now must sleep:  
 A brother dead, ah me! I weep:  
 At Argos him by fate opprest  
 I left an infant at the breast.  
 A beauteous bud, whose opening charms  
 Then blossomed in his mother's arms,  
 Orestes, born to high command,  
 Th' imperial sceptre of the Argive land.  
 CHORUS. Leaving the sea-washed shore a herdsman comes  
 Speeding, with some fresh tidings to thee fraught.

HERDSMAN, IPHIGENIA, CHORUS.

HERD. Daughter of Agamemnon, and bright gem  
 Of Clytemnestra, hear strange things from me.  
 IPHIG. And what of terror doth thy tale import?  
 HERD. Two youths, swift-rowing 'twixt the clashing rocks  
 Of our wild sea, are landed on the beach;  
 A grateful offering at Diana's shrine,  
 And victims to the goddess. Haste, prepare  
 The sacred lavers and the previous rites.  
 IPHIG. Whence are the strangers? from what country named?  
 HERD. From Greece: this only, nothing more, I know.  
 IPHIG. Didst thou not hear what names the strangers bear?  
 HERD. One by the other was called Pylades.  
 IPHIG. How is the stranger, his companion, named?  
 HERD. This none of us can tell: we heard it not.  
 IPHIG. How saw you them? how seized them? by what chance?  
 HERD. 'Midst the rude cliffs that o'er the Euxine hang——  
 IPHIG. And what concern have herdsmen with the sea?  
 HERD. To wash our herds in the salt wave we came.  
 IPHIG. To what I asked return: how seized you them?  
 Tell me the manner; this I wish to know.  
 For slow the victims come, nor hath some while  
 The altar of the goddess, as was wont,  
 Been crimsoned with the streams of Grecian blood.  
 HERD. Our herds, which in the forests feed, we drove



Amidst the tide that rushes to the shore  
'Twixt the Symplegades: it was the place  
Where in the rifted rock the chafing surge  
Hath hollowed a rude cave, the haunt of those  
Whose quest is purple. Of our number there  
A herdsman saw two youths, and back returned  
With soft and silent step; then pointing said,  
"Do you not see them? These are deities  
That sit there." One, who with religious awe  
Revered the gods, with hands uplifted prayed,  
His eyes fixed on them: "Son of the sea-nymph  
Leucothoe, guardian of the lab'ring bark,  
Our Lord Palæmon, be propitious to us!  
Or sit you on our shores, bright sons of Jove,  
Castor and Pollux! Or the glorious boast  
Of Nereus, father of the noble choir  
Of fifty Nereids?" One, whose untaught mind  
Audacious folly hardened 'gainst the sense  
Of holy awe, scoffed at his prayers, and said:  
"These are wrecked mariners, that take their seat  
In the cleft rock through fear, as they have heard  
Our prescribed rite, that here we sacrifice  
The stranger." To the greater part he seemed  
Well to have spoken, and we judged it meet  
To seize the victims, by our country's law  
Due to the goddess. Of the stranger youths  
One at this instant started from the rock;  
Awhile he stood, and wildly tossed his head,  
And groaned, his loose arms trembling all their length,  
Convulsed with madness: as a hunter loud  
Then cried: "Dost thou behold her, Pylades,  
Dost thou not see this dragon fierce from hell  
Rushing to kill me, and against me rousing  
Her horrid vipers? See this other here,  
Emitting fire and slaughter from her vests,  
Sails on her wings, my mother in her arms  
Bearing, to hurl this mass of rock upon me!  
Ah, she will kill me! Whither shall I fly?"  
His visage might we see no more the same,  
And his voice varied, now the roar of bulls,  
The howl of dogs now uttering, mimic sounds  
Sent by the madd'ning Furies, as they say.  
Together thronging, as of death assured,  
We sit in silence: but he drew his sword,  
And like a lion rushing 'midst our herds  
Plunged in their sides the weapon, weening thus

To drive the Furies, till the briny wave  
Foamed with their blood. But when among our herds  
We saw this havoc made, we all 'gan rouse  
To arms, and blew our sounding shells t' alarm  
The neighb'ring peasants; for we thought in fight  
Rude herdsmen to these youthful strangers, trained  
To arms, ill matched; and forthwith to our aid  
Flocked numbers. But, his frenzy of its force  
Abating, on the earth the stranger falls,  
Foam bursting from his mouth! But when we saw  
Th' advantage, each adventured on, and hurled  
What might annoy him fall'n: the other youth  
Wiped off the foam, took of his person care,  
His fine-wrought robe spread over him, with heed  
The flying stones observing warded off  
The wounds, and each kind office to his friend  
Attentively performed. His sense returned,  
The stranger started up, and soon perceived  
The tide of foes that rolled impetuous on,  
The danger and distress that closed them round.  
He heaved a sigh. An unremitting storm  
Of stones we poured, and each incited each.  
Then we his dreadful exhortation heard:  
"Pylades, we shall die; but let us die  
With glory; draw thy sword, and follow me."  
But when we saw the enemies advance  
With brandished swords, the steep heights crowned with wood,  
We fill in flight: but others, if one flies,  
Press on them; if again they drive these back,  
What before fled turns, with a storm of stones  
Assaulting them; but, what exceeds belief,  
Hurled by a thousand hands not one could hit  
The victims of the goddess: scarce at length,  
Not by brave daring seized we them, but 'round  
We closed upon them, and their swords with stones  
Beat, wily, from their hands, for on their knees  
They through fatigue had sunk upon the ground.  
We bare them to the monarch of this land:  
He viewed them, and without delay to thee  
Sent them, devoted to the cleansing vase  
And to the altar. Victims such as these,  
O virgin, wish to find; for if such youths  
Thou offer, for thy slaughter Greece will pay,  
Her wrongs to thee at Aulis well avenged.

CHORUS. These things are wonderful, which thou hast told  
Of him, whoe'er he be, the youth from Greece

Arrived on this inhospitable shore.  
IPHIG. 'Tis well. Go thou, and bring the strangers hither.  
What here is to be done shall be our care.  
O my unhappy heart! before this hour  
To strangers thou wast gentle, always touched  
With pity, and with tears their tears repaid,  
When Grecians, natives of my country, came  
Into my hands: but from the dreams, which prompt  
To deeds ungentle, showing that no more  
Orestes views the sun's fair light, whoe'er  
Ye are that hither come, me will you find  
Relentless now. This is the truth, my friends:  
My heart is rent; and never will the wretch,  
Who feels affliction's cruel tortures, bear  
Goodwill to those that are more fortunate.  
Never came gale from Jove, nor flying bark,  
Which 'twixt the dang'rous rocks of th' Euxine sea  
Brought Helen hither, who my ruin wrought,  
Nor Menelaus; that on them my foul wrongs  
I might repay, and with an Aulis here  
Requite the Aulis there, where I was seized,  
And, as a heifer, by the Grecians slain.  
My father too, who gave me birth, was priest.  
Ah me! the sad remembrance of those ills  
Yet lives: how often did I stroke thy cheek,  
And, hanging on thy knees, address thee thus:  
Alas, my father! I by thee am led  
A bride to bridal rites unblest and base:  
Them, whilst by thee I bleed, my mother hymns,  
And th' Argive dames, with hymeneal strains,  
And with the jocund pipe the house resounds:  
But at the altar I by thee am slain;  
For Pluto was th' Achilles, not the son  
Of Peleus, whom to me thou didst announce  
Th' affianced bridegroom, and by guile didst bring  
To bloody nuptials in the rolling car.  
But, o'er mine eyes the veil's fine texture spread,  
This brother in my hands, who now is lost,  
I clasped not, though his sister, did not press  
My lips to his through virgin modesty,  
As going to the house of Peleus: then  
Each fond embrace I to another time  
Deferred, as soon to Argos to return.  
If, O unhappy brother, thou art dead,  
From what a state, thy father's envied height  
Of glory, loved Orestes, art thou torn!—

These false rules of the goddess much I blame:  
 Whoe'er of mortals is with slaughter stained,  
 Or hath at childbirth given assisting hands,  
 Or chanced to touch aught dead, she as impure  
 Drives from her altars; yet herself delights  
 In human victims bleeding at her shrine.  
 Ne'er did Latona, from th' embrace of Jove,  
 Bring forth such inconsistency: I then deem  
 The feast of Tantalus, where gods were guests,  
 Unworthy of belief, as that they fed  
 On his son's flesh delighted: and I think  
 These people, who themselves have a wild joy  
 In shedding human blood, their savage guilt  
 Charge on the goddess: for this truth I hold,  
 None of the gods is evil or doth wrong.

*Strophe 1.*

CHORUS. Ye rocks, ye clashing rocks, whose brow  
 Frowns o'er the darkened deeps below,  
 Whose wild inhospitable wave,  
 From Argos flying and her native spring,  
 The virgin once was known to brave,  
 Tormented with the Bryze's madd'ning sting,  
 From Europe when the rude sea o'er  
 She passed to Asia's adverse shore;  
 Who are these hapless youths, that dare to land,  
 Leaving those soft irriguous meads,  
 Where, his green margin fringed with reeds,  
 Eurotas rolls his ample tide,  
 Or Dirce's hallowed waters glide,  
 And touch this barb'rous, stranger-hating strand,  
 The altars where a virgin dew,  
 And blood the pillared shrine imbrues?

*Strophe 2.*

Did they with oars impetuous sweep,  
 Rank answering rank, the foamy deep,  
 And wing their bark with flying sails,  
 To raise their humble fortune their desire,  
 Eager to catch the rising gales,  
 Their bosoms with the love of gain on fire?  
 For sweet is Hope, to man's fond breast,  
 The hope of gain, insatiate guest,  
 Though on her oft attends Misfortune's train;  
 For daring man she tempts to brave

The dangers of the boist'rous wave,  
 And leads him heedless of his fate  
 Through many a distant, barb'rous state;  
 Vain his opinions, his pursuits are vain!  
 Boundless o'er some her power is shown,  
 But some her temp'rate influence own.

*Antistrophe 1.*

How did they pass the dang'rous rocks,  
 Clashing with rude, tremendous shocks?  
 How pass the savage-howling shore  
 Where once th' unhappy Phineus held his reign,  
 And sleep affrighted flies its roar,  
 Steering their rough course o'er this boist'rous main,  
 Formed in a ring beneath whose waves  
 The Nereid train in high-arched caves  
 Weave the light dance, and raise the sprightly song,  
 Whilst whisp'ring in their swelling sails  
 Soft Zephyrs breathe, or southern gales  
 Piping amidst their tackling play,  
 As their bark ploughs its wat'ry way  
 Those hoary cliffs, the haunts of birds, along,  
 To that wild strand, the rapid race  
 Where once Achilles deigned to grace?

*Antistrophe 2.*

Oh that from Troy some chance would bear  
 Leda's loved daughter, fatal fair  
 (The royal virgin's vows are mine),  
 That her bright tresses rolled in crimson dew,  
 Her warm blood flowing at this shrine,  
 The altar of the goddess might imbrue,  
 And Vengeance, righteous to repay  
 Her former mischiefs, seize her prey!  
 But with what rapture should I hear his voice,  
 If one this shore should reach from Greece,  
 And bid the toils of slav'ry cease!  
 Or might I in the hour of rest  
 With pleasing dreams of Greece be blest,  
 So in my house, my native land rejoice,  
 In sleep enjoy the pleasing strain  
 For happiness restored again!

IPHIG. But the two youths, their hands fast bound in chains,  
 The late-seized victims to the goddess, come.

Silence, my friends: for destined at the shrine  
To bleed the Grecian strangers near approach,  
And no false tidings did the herdsman bring.  
CHORUS. Goddess revered, if grateful to thy soul  
This state presents such sacrifice, accept  
The victims, which the custom of this land  
Gives thee, but deemed unholy by the Greeks.

IPHIGENIA, ORESTES, PYLADES, CHORUS.

IPHIG. No more; that to the goddess each due rite  
Be well performed shall be my care. Unchain  
The strangers' hands, that, hallowed as they are,  
They may no more be bound. Go you, prepare  
Within the temple what the rites require.  
Unhappy youths, what mother brought you forth?  
Your father who? Your sister, if perchance  
Ye have a sister, of what youths deprived?  
For brother she shall have no more. Who knows  
Whom such misfortunes may attend? For dark  
What the gods' will creeps on; and none can tell  
The ills to come: this fortune from the sight  
Obscures. But, O unhappy strangers, say  
Whence came you? Sailed you long since for this land?  
But long will be your absence from your homes,  
For ever, in the dreary realms below.

ORESTES. Lady, whoe'er thou art, why for these things  
Dost thou lament? Why mourn for ills, which soon  
Will fall on us? Him I esteem unwise,

Who, when he sees death near, tries to o'ercome  
Its terrors with bewailings, without hope  
Of safety: ill he adds to ill, and makes  
His folly known, yet dies. We must give way

To fortune: therefore mourn not thou for us:  
We know, we are acquainted with your rites.

IPHIG. Which of you by the name of Pylades  
Is called? This first it is my wish to know.

ORESTES. If aught of pleasure that may give thee, he.

IPHIG. A native of what Grecian state, declare.

ORESTES. What profit, knowing this, wouldst thou obtain?

IPHIG. And are you brothers, of one mother born?

ORESTES. Brothers by friendship, lady, not by birth.

IPHIG. To thee what name was by thy father given?

ORESTES. With just cause I Unhappy might be called.

IPHIG. I ask not that; to fortune that ascribe.

ORESTES. Dying unknown rude scoffs I shall avoid.

IPHIG. Wilt thou refuse? Why are thy thoughts so high?



ORESTES. My body thou mayst kill, but not my name.  
IPHIG. Wilt thou not say a native of what state?  
ORESTES. The question nought avails, since I must die.  
IPHIG. What hinders thee from granting me this grace?  
ORESTES. Th' illustrious Argos I my country thence.  
IPHIG. By the gods, stranger, is thy birth from thence?  
ORESTES. My birth is from Mycenæ, once the blest.  
IPHIG. Dost thou an exile fly, or by what fate?  
ORESTES. Of my free will, in part not free, I fly.  
IPHIG. Wilt thou then tell me what I wish to know?  
ORESTES. Whate'er is foreign to my private griefs.  
IPHIG. To my dear wish from Argos art thou come.  
ORESTES. Not to my wish: but if to thine, enjoy it.  
IPHIG. Troy, whose fame spreads so wide, perchance thou knowst.  
ORESTES. Oh that I ne'er had known her, e'en in dreams!  
IPHIG. They say she is no more, by war destroyed.  
ORESTES. It is so: you have heard no false reports.  
IPHIG. Is Helena with Menelaus returned?  
ORESTES. She is: and one I love her coming rues.  
IPHIG. Where is she? Me too she of old hath wronged.  
ORESTES. At Sparta with her former lord she dwells.  
IPHIG. By Greece, and not by me alone, abhorred!  
ORESTES. I from her nuptials have my share of grief.  
IPHIG. And are the Greeks, as fame reports, returned?  
ORESTES. How briefly all things dost thou ask at once?  
IPHIG. This favour, ere thou die, I wish t' obtain.  
ORESTES. Ask then: since such thy wish, I will inform thee.  
IPHIG. Calchas, a prophet, came he back from Troy?  
ORESTES. He perished: at Mycenæ such the fame.  
IPHIG. Goddess revered! But doth Ulysses live?  
ORESTES. He lives they say; but is not yet returned.  
IPHIG. Perish the wretch, nor see his country more!  
ORESTES. Wish him not ill, for all with him is ill.  
IPHIG. But doth the son of sea-born Thetis live?  
ORESTES. He lives not: vain his nuptial rites at Aulis.  
IPHIG. That all was fraud, as those, who felt it, say.  
ORESTES. But who art thou, inquiring thus of Greece?  
IPHIG. I am from thence, in early youth undone.  
ORESTES. Thou hast a right t' inquire what there hath passed.  
IPHIG. What knowst thou of the chief, men call the blest?  
ORESTES. Who? Of the blest was not the chief I knew.  
IPHIG. The royal Agamemnon, son of Atreus.  
ORESTES. Of him I know not, lady; cease to ask.  
IPHIG. Nay, by the gods, tell me, and cheer my soul.  
ORESTES. He's dead, th' unhappy chief; no single ill.  
IPHIG. Dead! By what adverse fate? Oh wretched me!

ORESTES. Why mourn for this? How doth it touch thy breast?

IPHIG. The glories of his former state I mourn.

ORESTES. Dreadfully murdered by a woman's hand.

IPHIG. How wretched she that slew him, he thus slain!

ORESTES. Now then forbear: of him inquire no more.

IPHIG. This only; lives th' unhappy monarch's wife?

ORESTES. She, lady, is no more, slain by her son.

IPHIG. Alas, the ruined house! What his intent?

ORESTES. T' avenge on her his noble father slain.

IPHIG. An ill, but righteous deed, how justly done!

ORESTES. Though righteous, by the gods he is not blest.

IPHIG. Hath Agamemnon other offspring left?

ORESTES. He left one virgin daughter, named Electra.

IPHIG. Of her, that died a victim, is aught said?

ORESTES. This only, dead she sees the light no more.

IPHIG. Unhappy she! the father too, who slew her!

ORESTES. For a bad woman she unseemly died.

IPHIG. At Argos lives the murdered father's son?

ORESTES. Nowhere he lives, poor wretch, and everywhere.

IPHIG. False dreams, farewell: for nothing you import.

ORESTES. Nor are those gods, that have the name of wise,

Less false than fleeting dreams. In things divine,

And in things human, great confusion reigns.

One thing is left; that, not unwise of soul,

Obedient to the prophet's voice he perished;

For that he perished they, who know, report.

CHORUS. What shall we know, what of our parents know?

If yet they live, or not, who can inform us?

IPHIG. Hear me: this converse prompts a thought, which gives

Promise of good, ye youths of Greece, to you,

To these, and me; thus may it well be done,

If willing to my purpose all assent.

Wilt thou, if I shall save thee, go for me

A messenger to Argos, to my friends

Charged with a letter, which a captive wrote,

Who pitied me, nor murd'rous thought my hand,

But that he died beneath the law, these rites

The goddess deeming just? For from that hour

I have not found who might to Argos bear

Himself my message, back with life returned,

Or send to any of my friends my letter.

Thou therefore, since it seems thou dost not bear

Ill will to me, and dost Mycenæ know,

And those I wish t' address, be safe, and live,

No base reward for a light letter life

Receiving: and let him, since thus the state

Requires, without thee to the goddess bleed.

ORESTES. Virgin unknown, well hast thou said in all

Save this, that to the goddess he should bleed

A victim; that were heavy grief indeed.

I steered the vessel to these ills, he sailed

Attendant on my toils: to gain thy grace

By his destruction, and withdraw myself

From sufferings, were unjust. Thus let it be:

Give him the letter; to fulfil thy wish

To Argos he will bear it: me let him,

Who claims that office, slay. Base is his soul,

Who in calamities involves his friends,

And saves himself: this is a friend, whose life,

Dear to me as my own, I would preserve.

IPHIG. Excellent spirit! From some noble root

It shows thee sprung, and to thy friends a friend

Sincere: of those that share my blood if one

Remains, such may he be; for I am not

Without a brother, strangers, from my sight

Though distant now. Since then thy wish is such,

Him will I send to Argos: he shall bear

My letter, thou shalt die; for this desire

Hath strong possession of thy noble soul.

ORESTES. Who then shall do the dreadful deed, and slay me?

IPHIG. I: to atone the goddess is my charge.

ORESTES. A charge unenvied, virgin, and unblessed.

IPHIG. Necessity constrains: I must obey.

ORESTES. Wilt thou, a woman, plunge the sword in men?

IPHIG. No: but thy locks to sprinkle round is mine.

ORESTES. Whose then, if I may ask, the bloody deed?

IPHIG. To some within the temple this belongs.

ORESTES. What tomb is destined to receive my corse?

IPHIG. The hallowed fire within, and a dark cave.

ORESTES. Oh that a sister's hand might wrap these limbs!

IPHIG. Vain wish, unhappy youth, whoe'er thou art,

Hast thou conceived; for from this barbarous land

Far is her dwelling. Yet of what my power

Permits, since thou from Argos drawst thy birth,

No grace will I omit; for in thy tomb

I will place much of ornament, and pour

The dulcet labour of the yellow bee,

From mountain flowers extracted, on thy pyre.

But I will go, and from the temple bring

The letter: yet 'gainst me no hostile thought

Conceive. You that attend here, guard them well,

But without chains. To one, whom most I love

Of all my friends, to Argos I shall send  
Tidings perchance unlooked for; and this letter,  
Declaring those, whom he thought dead, alive,  
Shall bear him an assured and solid joy.

PYLADES, ORESTES, CHORUS.

CHORUS. Thee, o'er whose limbs the bloody drops shall soon  
Be from the lavers sprinkled, I lament.

ORESTES. This asks no pity, strangers: but farewell.

CHORUS. Thee, for thy happy fate we reverence, youth,  
Who to thy country shalt again return.

PYLADES. To friends unwished, who leave their friends to die.

CHORUS. Painful dismissal! Which shall I esteem  
Most lost, alas, alas! which most undone!

For doubts my wav'ring judgment yet divide,  
If chief for thee my sighs should swell, or thee.

ORESTES. By the gods, Pylades, is thy mind touched  
In manner like as mine?

PYLADES. I cannot tell;  
Nor to thy question have I to reply.

ORESTES. Who is this virgin? With what zeal for Greece  
Made she inquiries of us what the toils

At Troy, if yet the Grecians were returned,  
And Calchas, from the flight of birds who formed

Presages of the future? And she named  
Achilles: with what tenderness bewailed

Th' unhappy Agamemnon! Of his wife  
She asked me, of his children: thence her race

This unknown virgin draws, an Argive; else  
Ne'er would she send this letter, nor have wished

To know these things, as if she bore a share,  
If Argos flourish, in its prosperous state.

PYLADES. Such were my thoughts (but thou hast given them words,  
Preventing me), of every circumstance,

Save one: the fate of kings all know, whose state  
Holds aught of rank. But pass to other thoughts.

ORESTES. What? Share them; so thou best mayst be informed.

PYLADES. That thou shouldst die, and I behold this light,  
Were base: with thee I sailed, with thee to die

Becomes me; else shall I obtain the name  
Of a vile coward through the Argive state,

And the deep vales of Phocis. Most will think,  
For most think ill, that by betraying thee

I saved myself, home to return alone:

Or haply that I slew thee, and thy death  
Contrived, that in the ruin of thy house

Thy empire I might grasp, to me devolved  
As wedded to thy sister, now sole heir.  
These things I fear, and hold them infamous.  
Behoves me then with thee to die, with thee  
To bleed a victim, on the pyre with thine  
To give my body to the flames; for this  
Becomes me as thy friend, who dread reproach.

ORESTES. Speak more auspicious words: 'tis mine to bear  
Ills that are mine: and single when the woe,  
I would not bear it double. What thou sayst  
Is vile and infamous, would light on me,  
Should I cause thee to die, who in my toils  
Hast borne a share: to me, who from the gods  
Suffer afflictions which I suffer, death  
Is not unwelcome: thou art happy, thine  
An unpolluted and a prosperous house;  
Mine impious and unblest. If thou art saved,  
And from my sister, whom I gave to thee  
Betrothed thy bride, art blessed with sons, my name  
May yet remain, nor all my father's house  
In total ruin sink. Go then, and live;  
Dwell in the mansion of thy ancestors.  
And when thou comst to Greece, to Argos famed  
For warrior-steeds, by this right hand I charge thee  
Raise a sepulchral mound, and on it place  
A monument to me; and to my tomb  
Her tears, her tresses let my sister give:  
And say that by an Argive woman's hand  
I perished, to the altar's bloody rites  
A hallowed victim. Never let thy soul  
Betray my sister, for thou seest her state  
Of friends how destitute, her father's house  
How desolate. Farewell! Of all my friends  
Thee have I found most friendly, from my youth  
Trained up with me, in all my sylvan sports  
Thou dear associate, and through many toils  
Thou faithful partner of my miseries.  
Me Phœbus, though a prophet, hath deceived,  
And meditating guile hath driven me far  
From Greece, of former oracles ashamed;  
To him resigned, obedient to his words,  
I slew my mother, and my meed is death.

PYLADES. Yes, I will raise thy tomb: thy sister's bed  
I never will betray, unhappy youth,  
For I will hold thee dearer when thou'rt dead,  
Than while thou livest; nor hath yet the voice



Of Phœbus quite destroyed thee, though thou stand  
To slaughter nigh: but sometimes mighty woes  
Yield mighty changes, so when fortune wills.

ORESTES. Forbear: the words of Phœbus nought avail me;  
For passing from the shrine the virgin comes.

IPHIGENIA, ORESTES, PYLADES, CHORUS.

IPHIG. Go you away [*to the GUARDS*], and in the shrine prepare  
What those, who o'er the rites preside, require.—

Here, strangers, is the letter folded close.

What I would further, hear: the mind of man

In dangers, and again from fear relieved

Of safety when assured, is not the same:

I therefore fear lest he, who should convey

To Argos this epistle, when returned

Safe to his native country will neglect

My letter, as a thing of little worth.

ORESTES. What wouldst thou then? What is thy anxious thought?

IPHIG. This; let him give an oath that he will bear

To Argos this epistle to those friends

To whom it is my ardent wish to send it.

ORESTES. And wilt thou in return give him thy oath?

IPHIG. That I will do, or will not do, say what.

ORESTES. To send him from this barbarous shore alive.

IPHIG. That's just; how should he bear my letter else?

ORESTES. But will the monarch to these things assent?

IPHIG. By me induced. Him I will see embarked.

ORESTES. Swear then; and thou propose the righteous oath.

IPHIG. This, let him say, he to my friends will give.

PYLADES. Well; to thy friends this letter I will give.

IPHIG. Thee will I send safe through the dark'ning rocks.

PYLADES. What god dost thou invoke t' attest thy oath?

IPHIG. Diana, at whose shrine high charge I hold.

PYLADES. And I heaven's potent king, the awful Jove.

IPHIG. But if thou slight thy oath, and do me wrong?

PYLADES. Never may I return. But if thou fail,

And save me not?

IPHIG.                               Then never whilst I live

May I revisit my loved Argos more.

PYLADES. One thing, not mentioned, thy attention claims.

IPHIG. If honour owns it, this will touch us both.

PYLADES. Let me in this be pardoned, if the bark

Be lost, and with it in the surging waves

Thy letter perish, and I naked gain

The shore, no longer binding be the oath.

IPHIG. Knowst thou what I will do? For various ills



Arise to those that plough the dangerous deep.  
 What in this letter is contained, what here  
 Is written, all I will repeat to thee,  
 That thou mayst bear my message to my friends.

'Gainst danger thus I guard: if thou preserve

The letter, that though silent will declare

My purport: if it perish in the sea

Saving thyself my words too thou wilt save.

PYLADES. Well hast thou said touching the gods and me.

Say then, to whom at Argos shall I bear

This letter? What relate as heard from thee?

IPHIG. This message to Orestes, to the son

Of Agamemnon bear: "She, who was slain

At Aulis, Iphigenia, sends thee this:

She lives, but not to those who then were there."

ORESTES. Where is she? From the dead returned to life?

IPHIG. She whom thou seest; but interrupt me not.

To Argos, O my brother, ere I die

Bear me from this barbaric land, and far

Remove me from this altar's bloody rites,

At which to slay the stranger is my charge.

ORESTES. What shall I say? Where are we, Pylades?

IPHIG. Or on thy house for vengeance will I call,

Orestes—Twice repeated, learn the name.

ORESTES. Ye gods!

IPHIG. In my cause why invoke the gods?

ORESTES. Nothing; proceed. My thoughts were wand'ring wide.

Strange things of thee unasked I soon shall learn.

IPHIG. Tell him the goddess saved me, in exchange

A hind presenting, which my father slew

A victim, deeming that he plunged his sword

Deep in my breast; me in this land she placed.

Thou hast my charge; and this my letter speaks.

PYLADES. Oh thou hast bound me with an easy oath;

What I have sworn with honest purpose, long

Defer I not, but thus discharge mine oath.

To thee a letter from thy sister, lo,

I bear, Orestes; and I give it thee.

ORESTES. I do receive it, but forbear t' unclose

Its foldings, greater pleasure first t' enjoy

Than words can give. My sister, O most dear,

Astonished e'en to disbelief I throw

Mine arms around thee with a fond embrace,

In transport at the wond'rous things I hear.

CHORUS. Stranger, thou dost not well with hands profane

Thus to pollute the priestess of the shrine,

Grasping her garments hallowed from the touch.

ORESTES. My sister, my dear sister, from one sire,

From Agamemnon sprung, turn not away,

Holding thy brother thus beyond all hope.

IPHIG. My brother! Thou my brother! Wilt thou not

Unsay these words? At Argos far he dwells.

ORESTES. Thy brother, O unhappy! is not there.

IPHIG. Thee did the Spartan Tyndarus bring forth?

ORESTES. And from the son of Pelops' son I sprung.

IPHIG. What sayst thou? Canst thou give me proof of this?

ORESTES. I can: ask something of my father's house.

IPHIG. Nay, it is thine to speak, mine to attend.

ORESTES. First let me mention things which I have heard

Electra speak: to thee is known the strife

Which fierce 'twixt Atreus and Thyestes rose.

IPHIG. Yes, I have heard it; for the golden ram.

ORESTES. In the rich texture didst thou not inweave it?

IPHIG. O thou most dear! Thou windest near my heart.

ORESTES. And image in the web th' averted sun?

IPHIG. In the fine threads that figure did I work.

ORESTES. For Aulis did thy mother bathe thy limbs?

IPHIG. I know it, to unlucky spousals led.

ORESTES. Why to thy mother didst thou send thy locks?

IPHIG. Devoted for my body to the tomb.

ORESTES. What I myself have seen I now as proofs

Will mention. In thy father's house hung high

Within thy virgin chambers the old spear

Of Pelops, which he brandished when he slew

Cenomaus, and won his beauteous bride,

The virgin Hippodamia, Pisa's boast.

IPHIG. O thou most dear, for thou art he, most dear

Acknowledged, thee, Orestes, do I hold,

From Argos, from thy country distant far?

ORESTES. And hold I thee, my sister, long deemed dead?

Grief mixed with joy, and tears, not taught by woe

To rise, stand melting in thy eyes and mine.

IPHIG. Thee yet an infant in thy nurse's arms

I left, a babe I left thee in the house.

Thou art more happy, O my soul, than speech

Knows to express. What shall I say? 'Tis all

Surpassing wonder and the power of words.

ORESTES. May we together from this hour be blest!

IPHIG. An unexpected pleasure, O my friends,

Have I received; yet fear I from my hands

Lest to the air it fly. O sacred hearths

Raised by the Cyclops! O my country, loved

Mycenæ! Now that thou didst give me birth  
 I thank thee; now I thank thee that my youth  
 Thou trainedst, since my brother thou hast trained,  
 A beam of light, the glory of his house.

ORESTES. We in our race are happy; but our life,  
 My sister, by misfortunes is unhappy.

IPHIG. I was, I know, unhappy when the sword  
 My father, frenetic, pointed at my neck.

ORESTES. Ah me! methinks e'en now I see thee there.

IPHIG. When to Achilles, brother, not a bride  
 I to the sacrifice by guile was led,  
 And tears and groans the altar compassed round.

ORESTES. Alas the lovers there!

IPHIG. I mourned the deed  
 My father dared; unlike a father's love,  
 Cruel, unlike a father's love, to me.

ORESTES. Ill deeds succeed to ill; if thou hadst slain  
 Thy brother, by some god impelled, what griefs  
 Must have been thine at such a dreadful deed!

IPHIG. Dreadful, my brother, oh how dreadful! Scarce  
 Hast thou escaped a foul, unhallowed death,  
 Slain by my hands. But how will these things end?  
 What fortune will assist me? What safe means  
 Shall I devise to send thee from this state,  
 From slaughter, to thy native land, to Argos,  
 Ere with thy blood the cruel sword be stained?  
 This to devise, O my unhappy soul!

This to devise is thine. Wilt thou by land,  
 Thy bark deserted, speed thy flight on foot?  
 Perils await thee 'midst these barbarous tribes  
 Through pathless wilds. And 'twixt the clashing rocks  
 Narrow the passage for the flying bark,  
 And long. Unhappy, ah unhappy me!  
 What god, what mortal, what unlooked-for chance  
 Will expedite our dangerous way, and show  
 Two sprung from Atreus a release from ills?

CHORUS. What having seen and heard I shall relate  
 Is marvellous, and passes fabling tales.

PYLADES. When after absence long, Orestes, friend  
 Meets friend, embraces will express their joy.  
 Behoves us now, bidding farewell to grief  
 And heedful to obtain the glorious name  
 Of safety, from this barbarous land to fly.  
 The wise, of fortune not regardless, seize  
 Th' occasion, and to happiness advance.

ORESTES. Well hast thou said; and Fortune here, I ween,

Will aid us: to the firm and strenuous mind

More potent works the influence divine.

IPHIG. Nothing shall check, nothing restrain my speech:

First will I question thee what fortune waits

Electra: this to know would yield me joy.

ORESTES. With him she dwells, and happy is her life.

IPHIG. Whence then is he? and from what father sprung?

ORESTES. From Phocis: Strophius is his father named.

IPHIG. By Atreus' daughter to my blood allied?

ORESTES. Nearly allied: my only faithful friend.

IPHIG. He was not then, me when my father slew.

ORESTES. Childless was Strophius for some length of time.

IPHIG. O thou, the husband of my sister, hail!

ORESTES. More than relation, my preserver too.

IPHIG. But to thy mother why that dreadful deed?

ORESTES. Of that no more: t' avenge my father's death.

IPHIG. But for what cause did she her husband slay?

ORESTES. Of her inquire not: thou wouldst blush to hear.

IPHIG. The eyes of Argos now are raised to thee.

ORESTES. There Menelaus is lord; I, outcast, fly.

IPHIG. Hath he then wronged his brother's ruined house?

ORESTES. Not so: the Furies fright me from the land.

IPHIG. The madness this, which seized thee on the shore?

ORESTES. I was not first beheld unhappy there.

IPHIG. Stern powers; they haunt thee for thy mother's blood.

ORESTES. And ruthless make me champ the bloody bit.

IPHIG. Why to this region hast thou steered thy course?

ORESTES. Commanded by Apollo's voice I come.

IPHIG. With what intent? if that may be disclosed.

ORESTES. I will inform thee, though to length of speech

This leads. When vengeance from my hands o'ertook

My mother's deed, foul deeds which let me pass

In silence, by the Furies' fierce assaults

To flight I was impelled: to Athens then

Apollo sent me, that, my cause there heard,

I might appease the vengeful powers, whose names

May not be uttered. The tribunal there

Is holy, which for Mars when stained with blood

Jove in old times established. There arrived

None willingly received me, by the gods

As one abhorred; and they, who felt the touch

Of shame, the hospitable board alone

Yielded, and though one common roof beneath,

Their silence showing they disdained to hold

Converse with me, I took from them apart

A lone repast; to each was placed a bowl

Of the same measure; this they filled with wine,  
 And bathed their spirits in delight. Unmeet  
 I deemed it to express offence at those  
 Who entertained me, but in silence grieved,  
 Showing a cheer as though I marked it not,  
 And sighed for that I shed my mother's blood.  
 A feast, I hear, at Athens is ordained  
 From this my evil plight, e'en yet observed,  
 In which the equal-measured bowl then used  
 Is by that people held in honour high.  
 But when to the tribunal on the mount  
 Of Mars I came, one stand I took, and one  
 The eldest of the Furies opposite:  
 The cause was heard touching my mother's blood,  
 And Phœbus saved me by his evidence;  
 Equal, by Pallas numbered, were the votes,  
 And I from doom of blood victorious freed.  
 Such of the Furies as there sate, appeased  
 By the just sentence, nigh the court resolved  
 To fix their seat; but others, whom the law  
 Appeased not, with relentless tortures still  
 Pursued me, till I reached the hallowed soil  
 Of Phœbus. Stretched before his shrine I swore  
 Foodless to waste my wretched life away,  
 Unless the god, by whom I was undone,  
 Would save me. From the golden tripod burst  
 The voice divine, and sent me to this shore,  
 Commanding me to bear the image hence,  
 Which fell from Jove, and in th' Athenian land  
 To fix it. What th' oracular voice assigned  
 My safety, do thou aid. If we obtain  
 The statue of the goddess, I no more  
 With madness shall be tortured, but this arm  
 Shall place thee in my bark, which ploughs the waves  
 With many an oar, and to Mycenæ safe  
 Bear thee again. Show then a sister's love,  
 O thou most dear, preserve thy father's house,  
 Preserve me too; for me destruction waits,  
 And all the race of Pelops, if we bear not  
 This heaven-descended image from the shrine.  
 CHORUS. The anger of the gods hath raged severe,  
 And plunged the race of Tantalus in woes.  
 IPHIG. Ere thy arrival here, a fond desire  
 To be again at Argos, and to see  
 Thee, my loved brother, filled my soul. Thy wish  
 Is my warm wish, to free thee from thy toils,



And from its ruins raise my father's house;  
Nor harbour I 'gainst him, that slew me, thought  
Of harsh resentment: from thy blood my hands  
Would I keep pure, thy house I would preserve.  
But from the goddess how may this be hid?  
The tyrant too I fear, when he shall find  
The statue on its marble base no more.  
What then from death will save me? What excuse  
Shall I devise? Yet by one daring deed  
Might these things be achieved, couldst thou bear hence  
The image, me too in thy gallant bark  
Placing secure, how glorious were th' attempt!  
Me if thou join not with thee, I am lost  
Indeed; but thou, with prudent measures formed,  
Return. I fly no danger, not e'en death,  
Be death required, to save thee. No: the man  
Dying is mourned as to his house a loss;  
But woman's weakness is of light esteem.  
ORESTES. I would not be the murderer of my mother,  
And of thee too; sufficient is her blood.  
No; I will share thy fortune, live with thee,  
Or with thee die: to Argos I will lead thee,  
If here I perish not; or dying here  
Remain with thee. But what my mind suggests  
Hear: if Diana were averse to this,  
How could the voice of Phœbus from his shrine  
Declare that to the state of Pallas hence  
The statue of the goddess I should bear,  
And see thy face? All this together weighed  
Gives hope of fair success, and our return.  
IPHIG. But how effect it, that we neither die,  
And what we wish achieve? For our return  
On this depends: this claims deliberate thought.  
ORESTES. Have we not means to work the tyrant's death?  
IPHIG. For strangers full of peril were th' attempt.  
ORESTES. Thee would it save and me, it must be dared.  
IPHIG. I could not: yet thy promptness I approve.  
ORESTES. What if thou lodge me in the shrine concealed?  
IPHIG. That in the shades of night we may escape?  
ORESTES. Night is a friend to frauds, the light to truth.  
IPHIG. Within are sacred guards; we 'scape not them.  
ORESTES. Ruin then waits us: how can we be saved?  
IPHIG. I think I have some new and safe device.  
ORESTES. What is it? Let me know: impart thy thought.  
IPHIG. Thy sufferings for my purpose I will use.  
ORESTES. To form devices quick is woman's wit.



IPHIG. And say, thy mother slain thou fledst from Argos.

ORESTES. If to aught good, avail thee of my ills.

IPHIG. Unmeet then at this shrine to offer thee.

ORESTES. What cause alleged? I reach not thine intent.

IPHIG. As now impure: when hallowed, I will slay thee.

ORESTES. How is the image thus more promptly gained?

IPHIG. Thee I will hallow in the ocean waves.

ORESTES. The statue we would gain is in the temple.

IPHIG. That, by thy touch polluted, I would cleanse.

ORESTES. Where? On the wat'ry margin of the main?

IPHIG. Where thy tall bark secured with cables rides.

ORESTES. And who shall bear the image in his hands?

IPHIG. Myself: profaned by any touch but mine.

ORESTES. What of this blood shall on my friend be charged?

IPHIG. His hands, it shall be said, like thine are stained.

ORESTES. In secret this, or to the king disclosed?

IPHIG. With his assent; I cannot hide it from him.

ORESTES. My bark with ready oars attends thee near.

IPHIG. That all be well appointed be thy charge.

ORESTES. One thing alone remains, that these conceal

Our purpose: but address them, teach thy tongue

Persuasive words: a woman hath the power

To melt the heart to pity: thus perchance

All things may to our warmest wish succeed.

IPHIG. Ye train of females, to my soul most dear,

On you mine eyes are turned, on you depends

My fate: with prosperous fortune to be blest,

Or to be nothing, to my country lost,

Of a dear kinsman and a much loved brother

Deprived. This plea I first would urge, that we

Are women, and have hearts by nature formed

To love each other, of our mutual trusts

Most firm preservers. Touching our design

Be silent, and assist our flight; nought claims

More honour than the faithful tongue. You see

How the same fortune links us three, most dear

Each to the other, to revisit safe

Our country, or to die. If I am saved,

That thou mayst share my fortune, I to Greece

Will bring thee safe: but thee by this right hand,

Thee I conjure, and thee; by this loved cheek

Thee, by thy knees, by all that in your house

Is dearest to you, father, mother, child,

If you have children. What do you reply?

Which of you speaks assent? Or which dissents?

But be you all assenting: for my plea

If you approve not, ruin falls on me,  
And my unhappy brother too must die.

CHORUS. Be confident, loved lady, and consult  
Only thy safety: all thou givst in charge,  
Be witness, mighty Jove, I will conceal.

IPHIG. Oh for this generous promise be you blest!

To enter now the temple be thy part,  
And thine: for soon the monarch of the land  
Will come, inquiring if the strangers yet  
Have bowed their necks as victims at the shrine.—  
Goddess revered, who in the dreadful bay  
Of Aulis from my father's slaughtering hand  
Didst save me, save me now, and these; through thee  
Else will the voice of Phœbus be no more  
Held true by mortals: from this barbarous land  
To Athens go propitious; here to dwell  
Beseeems thee not: thine be a polished state!

*Strophe 1.*

CHORUS. O bird, that round each craggy height  
Projecting o'er the sea below,  
Wheelest thy melancholy flight,  
Thy song attuned to notes of woe;  
The wise thy tender sorrows own,  
Which thy lost lord unceasing moan:  
Like thine, sad Halcyon, be my strain,  
A bird that have no wings to fly:  
With fond desire for Greece I sigh,  
And for my much loved social train;  
Sigh for Diana, pitying maid,  
Who joys to rove o'er Cynthus' heights,  
Or in the branching laurel's shade,  
Or in the soft-haired palm delights,  
Or the hoar olive's sacred boughs,  
Lenient of sad Latona's woes,  
Or in the lake that rolls its wave  
Where swans their plumage love to lave,  
Then to the Muses soaring high,  
The homage pay of melody.

*Antistrophe 1.*

Ye tears, what frequent-falling showers  
Rolled down these cheeks in streams of woe,  
When in the dust my country's towers  
Lay levelled by the conquering foe;

And, to their spears a prey, their oars  
 Brought me to these barbaric shores!  
 For gold exchanged, a traffic base,  
     No vulgar slave, the task is mine  
     Here at Diana's awful shrine,  
 Who loves the woodland hind to chase,  
 The virgin priestess to attend,  
     Daughter of rich Mycenæ's lord;  
 At other shrines her wish to bend,  
     Where bleeds the victim less abhorred:  
 No respite to her griefs she knows,  
 Not so the heart inured to woes,  
 As trained to sorrow's rigid lore:  
 Now comes a change, it mourns no more.  
 But to long bliss when ill succeeds  
 The anguished heart for ever bleeds.

*Strophe 2.*

Thee, loved virgin, freed from fear  
 Home the Argive bark shall bear:  
 Mountain Pan, with shrilling strain,  
 To the oars that dash the main  
 In just cadence well agreed,  
 Shall accord his wax-joined reed:  
 Phœbus, with a prophet's fire  
 Sweeping o'er his seven-stringed lyre,  
 And his voice attuning high  
 To the swelling harmony,  
 Thee shall guide the wild waves o'er  
 To the soft Athenian shore.  
 Leaving me, thy oars shall sweep  
 Eager o'er the foaming deep;  
 Thou shalt catch the rising gales  
 Swelling in thy firm-bound sails,  
 And thy bark in gallant pride  
 Light shall o'er the billows glide.

*Antistrophe 2.*

Might I through the lucid air  
 Fly where rolls yon flaming car,  
 O'er these loved and modest bowers,  
 Where I passed my youthful hours,  
 I would stay my weary flight,  
 Wave no more my pennons light,  
 But amidst the virgin band,

Once my loved companions, stand:  
Once 'midst them my charms could move,  
Blooming then, the flames of love,  
When the mazy dance I trod,  
Whilst with joy my mother glowed;  
When to vie in grace was mine,  
And in splendid robes to shine;  
For with radiant tints imprest  
Glowed for me the gorgeous vest;  
And these tresses gave new grace,  
As their ringlets shade my face.

THOAS, IPHIGENIA, CHORUS

THOAS. Where is the Grecian lady, to whose charge  
This temple is committed? Have her rites  
Hallowed the strangers? Do their bodies burn  
In the recesses of the sacred shrine?

CHORUS. She comes, and will inform thee, king, of all.

THOAS. Daughter of Agamemnon, what means this!

The statue of the goddess in thine arms

Why dost thou bear from its firm base removed?

IPHIG. There in the portal, monarch, stay thy step.

THOAS. What of strange import in the shrine hath chanced?

IPHIG. Things ominous: that word I, holy, speak.

THOAS. To what is tuned thy proem? Plainly speak.

IPHIG. Not pure the victims, king, you lately seized.

THOAS. What showed thee this? Or speakest thou but thy thought?

IPHIG. Back turned the sacred image on its base.

THOAS. Spontaneous turned, or by an earthquake moved?

IPHIG. Spontaneous; and, averted, closed its eyes.

THOAS. What was the cause? The blood-stained strangers' guilt?

IPHIG. That and nought else; for horrible their deeds.

THOAS. What, have they slain some Scythian on the shore?

IPHIG. They came polluted with domestic blood.

THOAS. What blood? I have a strong desire to know.

IPHIG. They slew their mother with confederate swords.

THOAS. O Phœbus! This hath no barbarian dared.

IPHIG. All Greece indignant chased them from her realms.

THOAS. Bearest thou for this the image from the shrine?

IPHIG. To the pure air, from stain of blood removed.

THOAS. By what means didst thou know the strangers' guilt?

IPHIG. I learned it as the statue started back.

THOAS. Greece trained thee wise: this well hast thou discerned.

IPHIG. Now with sweet blandishments they soothe my soul.

THOAS. Some glozing tale from Argos telling thee?

IPHIG. I have one brother: he, they say, lives happy.

THOAS. That thou mayst save them for their pleasing news?

IPHIG. And that my father lives, by fortune blessed.

THOAS. But on the goddess well thy thoughts are turned.

IPHIG. I hate all Greece; for it hath ruined me.

THOAS. What with the strangers, say then, should be done?

IPHIG. The law ordained in reverence we must hold.

THOAS. Are then thy lavers ready, and the sword?

IPHIG. First I would cleanse them with ablutions pure.

THOAS. In fountain waters, or the ocean wave?

IPHIG. All man's pollutions doth the salt sea cleanse.

THOAS. More holy to the goddess will they bleed.

IPHIG. And better what I have in charge advance.

THOAS. Doth not the wave e'en 'gainst the temple beat?

IPHIG. This requires solitude: more must I do.

THOAS. Lead where thou wilt: on secret rites I pry not.

IPHIG. The image of the goddess I must cleanse.

THOAS. If it be stained with touch of mother's blood.

IPHIG. I could not else have borne it from its base.

THOAS. Just is thy provident and pious thought:

For this by all the state thou art revered.

IPHIG. Knowst thou what next I would?

THOAS. 'Tis thine thy will

To signify.

IPHIG. Give for these strangers chains.

THOAS. To what place can they fly?

IPHIG. A Grecian knows

Nought faithful.

THOAS. Of my train go some for chains.

IPHIG. Let them lead forth the strangers.

THOAS. Be it so.

IPHIG. And veil their faces.

THOAS. From the sun's bright beams?

IPHIG. Some of thy train send with me.

THOAS. These shall go

Attending thee.

IPHIG. One to the city send.

THOAS. With what instructions charged?

IPHIG. That all remain

Within their houses.

THOAS. That the stain of blood

They meet not?

IPHIG. These things have pollution in them.

THOAS. Go thou, and bear th' instructions.

IPHIG. That none come

In sight.

THOAS. How wisely careful for the city!

IPHIG. Warn our friends most.

THOAS. This speaks thy care for me.

IPHIG. Stay thou before the shrine.

THOAS. To what intent?

IPHIG. Cleanse it with lustral fires.

THOAS. That thy return

May find it pure?

IPHIG. But when the strangers come

Forth from the temple.

THOAS. What must I then do?

IPHIG. Spread o'er thine eyes a veil.

THOAS. That I receive not

Pollution?

IPHIG. Tedious if my stay appear.

THOAS. What bounds may be assigned?

IPHIG. Deem it not strange.

THOAS. At leisure what the rites require perform.

IPHIG. May this lustration as I wish succeed.

THOAS. Thy wish is mine.

IPHIG. But from the temple, see,

The strangers come, the sacred ornaments,

The hallowed lambs, for I with blood must wash

This execrable blood away, the light

Of torches, and what else my rites require

To purify these strangers to the goddess.

But to the natives of this land my voice

Proclaims, from this pollution far remove,

Art thou attendant at the shrine, who liftest

Pure to the gods thy hands, or nuptial rites

Dost thou prepare, or pregnant matron, hence

Be gone, that this defilement none may touch.

Thou, daughter of Latona and high Jove,

O royal virgin, if I cleanse the stain

Of these, and where I ought with holy rites

Address thee, thou shalt hold thy residence

In a pure mansion; we too shall be blest!

More though I speak not, goddess, unexpressed

All things to thee and to the gods are known.

CHORUS. Latona's glorious offspring claims the song,

Born the hallowed shades among

Where fruitful Delos winds her valleys low;

Bright-haired Phœbus skilled t' inspire

Raptures as he sweeps the lyre,

And she that glories in th' unerring bow.

From the rocky ridges steep,

At whose foot the hushed waves sleep,



Left their far-famed native shore,  
Them th' exulting mother bore  
To Parnassus, on whose heights  
Bacchus shouting holds his rites;  
Glitt'ring in the burnished shade,  
By the laurel's branches made,  
Where th' enormous dragon lies,  
Brass his scales, and flame his eyes,  
Earth-born monster, that around  
Rolling guards th' oracular ground:  
Him, while yet a sportive child  
In his mother's arms that smiled,  
Phœbus slew, and seized the shrine  
Whence proceeds the voice divine;  
On the golden tripod placed,  
Throne by falsehood ne'er disgraced,  
Where Castalia's pure stream flows,  
He the fates to mortals shows.  
But when Themis, whom of yore  
Earth, her fruitful mother, bore,  
From her hallowed seat he drove,  
Earth t' avenge her daughter strove,  
Forming visions of the night,  
Which, in rapt dreams hov'ring light,  
All that Time's dark volumes hold  
Might to mortal sense unfold,  
When in midnight's sable shades  
Sleep the silent couch invades:  
Thus did Earth her vengeance boast.  
His prophetic honours lost,  
Royal Phœbus speeds his flight  
To Olympus, on whose height  
At the throne of Jove he stands,  
Stretching forth his little hands,  
Suppliant that the Pythian shrine  
Feel no more the wrath divine;  
That the goddess he appease,  
That her nightly visions cease.  
Jove with smiles beheld his son  
Early thus address his throne,  
Suing with ambitious pride  
O'er the rich shrine to preside:  
He assenting bowed his head.  
Straight the nightly visions fled;  
And prophetic dreams no more  
Hovered slumb'ring mortals o'er:

Now to Phœbus given again  
 All his honours pure remain;  
 Votaries distant regions send  
 His frequented throne t' attend,  
 And the firm decrees of fate  
 On his faithful voice await.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

MESS. Say you, that keep the temple and attend  
 The altar, where is Thoas, Scythia's king?  
 Open these strong-compacted gates, and call  
 Forth from the shrine the monarch of the land.

CHORUS. Wherefore? At thy command if I must speak.

MESS. The two young men are gone, through the device  
 Of Agamemnon's daughter; from this land  
 They fly, and in their Grecian galley placed  
 The sacred image of the goddess bear.

CHORUS. Incredible thy tale: but whom thou seekest  
 The monarch from the temple went in haste.

MESS. Whither? For what is doing he should know.

CHORUS. We know not: but go thou and seek for him:  
 Where'er thou find him, thou wilt tell him this.

MESS. See, what a faithless race you women are!  
 In all that hath been done you have a part.

CHORUS. Sure thou art mad? What with the strangers' flight  
 Have we to do? But wilt thou not with all  
 The speed thou mayst go to the monarch's house?

MESS. Not till I first am well informed if here  
 Within the temple be the king or not.

Unbar the gates: to you within I speak;  
 And tell your lord that at the portal here  
 I stand, and bring him tidings of fresh ills.

THOAS, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

THOAS. Who at the temple of the goddess dares  
 This clamour raise, and thund'ring at the gates  
 Strikes terror through the ample space within?

MESS. With falsehoods would these women drive me hence,  
 Without to seek thee; thou wast in the shrine.

THOAS. With what intent? Or what advantage sought?

MESS. Of these hereafter: what more urgent now  
 Imports thee, hear: the virgin, in this place  
 Presiding at the altars, from this land  
 Is with the strangers fled, and bears with her  
 The sacred image of the goddess: all  
 Of her ablutions but a false pretence.

THOAS. How sayst thou? What is her accursed design?

MESS. To save Orestes: this too will amaze thee.

THOAS. Whom? What Orestes? Clytemnestra's son?

MESS. Him at the altar hallowed now to bleed.

THOAS. Portentous! For what less can it be called?

MESS. Think not on that, but hear me; with deep thought

Reflect; weigh well what thou shalt hear, devise

By what pursuit to reach and seize the strangers.

THOAS. Speak: thou advisest well; the sea though nigh,

They fly not so as to escape my spear.

MESS. When to the shore we came, where stationed rode

The galley of Orestes by the rocks

Concealed, to us, whom thou hadst sent with her

To hold the strangers' chains, the royal maid

Made signs that we retire, and stand aloof,

As if with secret rites she would perform

The purposed expiation: on she went

In her own hands holding the strangers' chains

Behind them: not without suspicion this,

Yet by thy servants, king, allowed. At length,

That we might deem her in some purpose high

Employed, she raised her voice, and chaunted loud

Barbaric strains, as if with mystic rites

She cleansed the stain of blood. When we had sate

A tedious while, it came into our thought

That from their chains unloosed the stranger youths

Might kill her, and escape by flight; yet fear

Of seeing what we ought not kept us still

In silence; but at length we all resolved

To go, though not permitted, where they were.

There we behold the Grecian bark, with oars

Well furnished, winged for flight; and at their seats

Grasping their oars were fifty rowers; free

From chains beside the stern the two youths stood.

Some from the prow relieved the keel with poles;

Some weighed the anchors up; the climbing ropes

Some hastened, through their hands the cables drew,

Launched the light bark, and gave her to the main.

But when we saw their treacherous wiles, we rushed

Heedless of danger, seized the priestess, seized

The halsers, hung upon the helm, and strove

To rend the rudder-bands away. Debate

Now rose: "What mean you, sailing o'er the seas,

The statue and the priestess from the land

By stealth conveying? Whence art thou, and who,

That bearest her, like a purchased slave, away?"

He said: "I am her brother, be of this  
Informed, Orestes, son of Agamemnon;  
My sister, so long lost, I bear away,  
Recovered here." But nought the less for that  
Held we the priestess, and by force would lead  
Again to thee; hence dreadful on our cheeks  
The blows; for in their hands no sword they held,  
Nor we; but many a rattling stroke the youths  
Dealt with their fists, against our sides and breasts  
Their arms fierce darting, till our battered limbs  
Were all disabled. Now with dreadful marks  
Disfigured up the precipice we fly,  
Some bearing on their heads, some in their eyes  
The bloody bruises; standing on the heights  
Our fight was safer, and we hurled at them  
Fragments of rocks; but standing on the stern  
The archers with their arrows drove us thence.  
And now a swelling wave rolled in, which drove  
The galley tow'rds the land; the sailors feared  
The sudden swell. On his left arm sustained  
Orestes bore his sister through the tide,  
Mounted the bark's tall side, and on the deck  
Safe placed her, and Diana's holy image  
Which fell from heaven: from the midship his voice  
He sent aloud, "Ye youths, that in this bark  
From Argos ploughed the deep, now ply your oars,  
And dash the billows till they foam: those things  
Are ours, for which we swept the Euxine sea,  
And steered our course within its clashing rocks."  
They gave a cheerful shout, and with their oars  
Dashed the salt wave. The galley, whilst it rode  
Within the harbour, worked its easy way;  
But having passed its mouth, the swelling flood  
Rolled on it, and with sudden force the wind  
Impetuous rising drove it back; their oars  
They slacked not, stoutly struggling 'gainst the wave;  
But tow'rds the land the reflux flood impelled  
The galley; then the royal virgin stood,  
And prayed: "O daughter of Latona, save me,  
Thy priestess save; from this barbaric land  
To Greece restore me, and forgive my thefts;  
For thou, O goddess, dost thy brother love,  
Deem then that I love those allied to me."  
The mariners responsive to her prayer  
Shouted loud pæans, and their naked arms,  
Each cheering each, to their stout oars apply.

But nearer, and yet nearer to the rock  
 The galley drove; some rushed into the sea,  
 Some strained the ropes that bind the loosened sails.  
 Straight was I hither sent to thee, O king,  
 T' inform thee of these accidents. But haste,  
 Take chains and gyves with thee; for if the flood  
 Subside not to a calm, there is no hope  
 Of safety to the strangers. Be assured  
 That Neptune, awful monarch of the main,  
 Remembers Troy, and, hostile to the race  
 Of Pelops, will deliver to thy hands,  
 And to thy people, as is meet, the son  
 Of Agamemnon; and bring back to thee  
 His sister, who the goddess hath betrayed,  
 Unmindful of the blood at Aulis shed.

CHORUS. Unhappy Iphigenia, thou must die,  
 Thy brother too must die, if thou again,  
 Seized in thy flight, to thy lord's hands shalt come.  
 THOAS. Inhabitants of this barbaric land,  
 Will you not rein your steeds, will you not fly  
 Along the shore, to seize whate'er this skiff  
 Of Greece casts forth, and for your goddess roused  
 Hunt down these impious men? Will you not launch  
 Instant your swift-oared barks, by sea, by land  
 To catch them, from the rugged rock to hurl  
 Their bodies, or impale them on the stake?  
 But for you women, in these dark designs  
 Accomplices, hereafter, as I find  
 Convenient leisure, I will punish you.

Th' occasion urges now, and gives no pause.  
 MINERVA. Whither, O royal Thoas, dost thou lead  
 This vengeful chase? Attend; Minerva speaks.  
 Cease thy pursuit, and stop this rushing flood  
 Of arms; for hither by the fateful voice  
 Of Phœbus came Orestes, warned to fly  
 The anger of the Furies, to convey  
 His sister to her native Argos back,  
 And to my land the sacred image bear.  
 Thoas, I speak to thee: him, whom thy rage  
 Would kill, Orestes, on the wild waves seized,  
 Neptune, to do me grace, already wafts  
 On the smooth sea, the swelling surges calmed.  
 And thou, Orestes (for my voice thou hearest,  
 Though distant far), to my commands attend:  
 Go, with the sacred image, which thou bearest,  
 And with thy sister: but when thou shalt come

To Athens, built by gods, there is a place  
On th' extreme borders of the Attic land,  
Close neighb'ring to Carystia's craggy height,  
Sacred, my people call it Alæ: there  
A temple raise, and fix the statue there,  
Which from the Tauric goddess shall receive  
Its name, and from thy toils, which thou, through Greece  
Driven by the Furies' madd'ning stings, hast borne;  
And mortals shall in future times with hymns  
The Tauric goddess there, Diana, hail.  
And be this law established, when the feast  
For thy deliverance from this shrine is held,  
To a man's throat that they apply the sword,  
And draw the blood, in memory of these rites,  
That of her honours nought the goddess lose.  
Thou, Iphigenia, on the hallowed heights  
Of Brauron on this goddess shalt attend  
Her priestess, dying shalt be there interred,  
Graced with the honours of the gorgeous vests  
Of finest texture, in their houses left  
By matrons who in childbed pangs expired.  
These Grecian dames back to their country lead,  
I charge thee: justice this return demands;  
For I saved thee, when on the mount of Mars  
The votes were equal: and from that decree,  
The shells in number equal, still absolve.  
But, son of Agamemnon, from this land  
Thy sister bear; nor, Thoas, be thou angry.  
THOAS. Royal Minerva, he that hears the gods  
Commanding, and obeys not, is unwise.  
My anger 'gainst Orestes flames no more,  
Gone though he be, and bears with him away  
The statue of the goddess, and his sister.  
Have mortals glory 'gainst the powerful gods  
Contending? Let them go, and to thy land  
The sacred image bear, and fix it there;  
Good fortune go with them. To favoured Greece  
These dames, at thy high bidding, I will send.  
My arms will I restrain, which I had raised  
Against the strangers, and my swift-oared barks,  
Since, potent goddess, this is pleasing to thee.  
MINERVA. I praise thy resolution; for the power  
Of fate o'er thee and o'er the gods prevails.  
Breathe soft ye fav'ring gales, to Athens bear  
These sprung from Agamemnon; on their course  
Attending I will go, and heedful save



My sister's sacred image. You too go [*to the CHORUS*]  
Prosp'rous, and in the fate that guards you blest.

CHORUS. O thou, among th' immortal gods revered,  
And mortal men, Minerva, we will do

As thou commandest; for with transport high,  
Exceeding hope, our ears receive thy words.

O Victory, I revere thy awful power:

Guard thou my life, nor ever cease to crown me!

# LYSISTRATA

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LYSISTRATA.

CALONICÉ.

MYRRHINÉ.

LAMPITO.

STRATYLLIS.

A MAGISTRATE.

CINESIAS.

A CHILD.

HERALD OF THE LACEDÆMONIANS.

ENVOYS OF THE LACEDÆMONIANS.

MARKET LOUNGERS.

A SERVANT.

AN ATHENIAN CITIZEN.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN.

CHORUS OF WOMEN.

SCENE:—In a public square at Athens; afterwards before the gates of the Acropolis, and finally within the precincts of the citadel.

LYSISTRATA (*alone*). Ah! if only they had been invited to a Bacchic revelling, or a feast of Pan or Aphrodité or Genetyllis, why! the streets would have been impassable for the thronging tambourines! Now there's never a woman here—ah! except my neighbour Calonicé, whom I see approaching under. . . . Good day, Calonicé.

CALONICÉ. Good day, Lysistrata; but pray, why this dark, forbidding face, my dear? Believe me, you don't look a bit pretty with those black lowering brows.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, Calonicé, my heart is on fire; I blush for our sex. Men *will* have it we are tricky and sly. . . .

CALONICÉ. And they are quite right, upon my word!

LYSISTRATA. Yet, look you, when the women are summoned to meet for a matter of the last importance, they lie abed instead of coming.

CALONICÉ. Oh! they will come, my dear; but 'tis not easy, you know, for women to leave the house. One is busy pottering about her husband; another is getting the servant up; a third is putting her child asleep or washing the infant or feeding it.

LYSISTRATA. But I tell you, the business that calls them here is far and away more urgent.

CALONICÉ. And why *do* you summon us, dear Lysistrata? What is it all about?

LYSISTRATA. About a big affair.

CALONICÉ. And is it thick too?

LYSISTRATA. Yes indeed, both big and great.

CALONICÉ. And we are not all on the spot!

LYSISTRATA. Oh! if it were what you suppose, there would be never an absentee. No, no, it concerns a thing I have turned about and about this way and that of many sleepless nights.

CALONICÉ. It must be something mighty fine and subtle for you to have turned it about so!

LYSISTRATA. So fine, it means just this, Greece saved by the women!

CALONICÉ. By women! Why, its salvation hangs on a poor thread then!

LYSISTRATA. Our country's fortunes depend on us—it is with us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.

CALONICÉ. That would be a noble deed truly!

LYSISTRATA. To exterminate the Bœotians to a man!

CALONICÉ. But surely you would spare the eels.

LYSISTRATA. For Athens' sake I will never threaten so fell a doom; trust me for that. However, if the Bœotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved.

CALONICÉ. But how should women perform so wise and glorious an achievement, we women who dwell in the retirement of the household, clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk and long flowing gowns, decked out with flowers and shod with dainty little slippers?

LYSISTRATA. Nay, but those are the very sheet-anchors of our salvation—those yellow tunics, those scents and slippers, those cosmetics and transparent robes.

CALONICÉ. How so, pray?

LYSISTRATA. There is not a man will wield a lance against another . . .

CALONICÉ. Quick, I will get me a yellow tunic from the dyer's.

LYSISTRATA. . . . or want a shield.

CALONICÉ. I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

LYSISTRATA. . . . or draw a sword.

CALONICÉ. I'll haste and buy a pair of slippers this instant.

LYSISTRATA. Now tell me, would not the women have done best to come?

CALONICÉ. Why, they should have *flown* here!

LYSISTRATA. Ah! my dear, you'll see that like true Athenians, they will do everything too late. . . . Why, there's not a woman come from the shoreward parts, not one from Salamis.

CALONICÉ. But I know for certain they embarked at daybreak.

LYSISTRATA. And the dames from Acharnæ! why, I thought they would have been the very first to arrive.

CALONICÉ. Theagenes' wife at any rate is sure to come; she has actually been to consult Hecatê. . . . But look! here are some arrivals—and there are more behind. Ah! ha! now what countrywomen may they be?

LYSISTRATA. They are from Anagyra.

CALONICÉ. Yes! upon my word, 'tis a levy *en masse* of all the female population of Anagyra!

MYRRHINÉ. Are we late, Lysistrata? Tell us, pray; what, not a word?

LYSISTRATA. I cannot say much for you, Myrrhiné! you have not bestirred yourself overmuch for an affair of such urgency.

MYRRHINÉ. I could not find my girdle in the dark. However, if the matter so pressing, here we are; so speak.

LYSISTRATA. No, but let us wait a moment more, till the women of Bœotia arrive and those from the Peloponnese.

MYRRHINÉ. Yes, that is best. . . . Ah! here comes Lampito.

LYSISTRATA. Good day, Lampito, dear friend from Lacedæmon. How well and handsome you look! what a rosy complexion! and how strong you seem; why, you could strangle a bull surely!

LAMPITO. Yes, indeed, I really think I could. 'Tis because I do gymnastics and practise the kick dance.

LYSISTRATA. And what superb bosoms!

LAMPITO. La! you are feeling me as if I were a beast for sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA. And this young woman, what countrywoman is she?

LAMPITO. She is a noble lady from Bœotia.

LYSISTRATA. Ah! my pretty Bœotian friend, you are as blooming as a garden.

CHORUS. Yes, on my word! and the garden is so prettily weeded too!

LYSISTRATA. And who is this?

LAMPITO. 'Tis an honest woman, by my faith! she comes from Corinth.

LYSISTRATA. Oh! honest, no doubt then—as honesty goes at Corinth.

LAMPITO. But who has called together this council of women, pray?

LYSISTRATA. I have.

LAMPITO. Well then, tell us what you want of us.

LYSISTRATA. With pleasure, my dear.

MYRRHINÉ. What is the most important business you wish to inform us about?

LYSISTRATA. I will tell you. But first answer me one question.

MYRRHINÉ. What is that?

LYSISTRATA. Don't you feel sad and sorry because the fathers of your children are far away from you with the army? For I'll undertake, there is not one of you whose husband is not abroad at this moment.

CALONICÉ. Mine has been the last five months in Thrace—looking after ucrates.

LYSISTRATA. 'Tis seven long months since mine left me for Pylos.

LAMPITO. As for mine, if he ever does return from service, he's no sooner back than he takes down his shield again and flies back to the wars.

LYSISTRATA. And not so much as the shadow of a lover! Since the day the Milesians betrayed us, I have never once seen an eight-inch-long *godemich* given, to be a leathern consolation to us poor widows. . . . Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the War, will you all second me?

MYRRHINÉ. Yes verily, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, though I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.

CALONICÉ. And so will I, though I must be split in two like a flat-fish, and have half myself removed.

LAMPITO. And I too; why, to secure Peace, I would climb to the top of Mount Taygetus.

LYSISTRATA. Then I will out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain . . .

MYRRHINÉ. Refrain from what? tell us, tell us!

LYSISTRATA. But will you do it?

MYRRHINÉ. We will, we will, though we should die of it.

LYSISTRATA. We must refrain from the male altogether. . . . Nay, why do you turn your backs on me? Where are you going? So, you bite your lips, and shake your heads, eh? Why these pale, sad looks? why these tears? Come, will you do it—yes or no? Do you hesitate?

MYRRHINÉ. No, I will not do it; let the War go on.

LYSISTRATA. And you, my pretty flat-fish, who declared just now they might split you in two?

CALONICÉ. Anything, anything but that! Bid me go through the fire, if you will; but to rob us of the sweetest thing in all the world, my dear, dear Lysistrata!

LYSISTRATA. And you?

MYRRHINÉ. Yes, I agree with the others; I too would sooner go through the fire.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, wanton, vicious sex! the poets have done well to make tragedies upon us; we are good for nothing then but love and lewdness! But you, my dear, you from hardy Sparta, if *you* join me, all may yet be well; help me, second me, I conjure you.

LAMPITO. 'Tis a hard thing, by the two goddesses it is! for a woman to sleep alone without ever a strong male in her bed. But there, Peace must come first.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, my dear, my dearest, best friend, you are the only one deserving the name of woman!

CALONICÉ. But if—which the gods forbid—we do refrain altogether from what you say, should we get peace any sooner?

LYSISTRATA. Of course we should, by the goddesses twain! We need only sit indoors with painted cheeks, and meet our mates lightly clad in transparent gowns of Amorgos silk, and employing all our charms and all our arts; then they will act like mad and they will be wild to lie with us. That will be the time to refuse, and they will hasten to make peace, I am convinced of that!

LAMPITO. Yes, just as Menelaus, when he saw Helen's naked bosom, threw away his sword, they say.

CALONICÉ. But, poor devils, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

LYSISTRATA. Then, as Pherecrates says, we must "flay a skinned dog," that's all.

CALONICÉ. Bah! these proverbs are all idle talk. . . . But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bedchamber?

LYSISTRATA. Hold on to the door posts.



CALONICÉ. But if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA. Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure for them, when they do it by force. Besides, there are a thousand ways of tormenting them. Never fear, they'll soon tire of the game; there's no satisfaction for a man, unless the woman shares it.

CALONICÉ. Very well, if you *will* have it so, we agree.

LAMPITO. For ourselves, no doubt we shall persuade our husbands to conclude a fair and honest peace; but there is the Athenian populace, how are we to cure these folk of their warlike frenzy?

LYSISTRATA. Have no fear; we undertake to make our own people hear reason.

LAMPITO. Nay, impossible, so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athené.

LYSISTRATA. Ah! but we have seen to that; this very day the Acropolis will be in our hands. That is the task assigned to the older women; while we are here in council, they are going, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to seize the citadel.

LAMPITO. Well said indeed! so everything is going for the best.

LYSISTRATA. Come, quick, Lampito, and let us bind ourselves by an inviolable oath.

LAMPITO. Recite the terms; we will swear to them.

LYSISTRATA. With pleasure. Where is our Usheress? Now, what are you staring at, pray? Lay this shield on the earth before us, its hollow upwards, and someone bring me the victim's inwards.

CALONICÉ. Lysistrata, say, what oath are we to swear?

LYSISTRATA. What oath? Why, in Æschylus, they sacrifice a sheep, and swear over a buckler; we will do the same.

CALONICÉ. No, Lysistrata, one cannot swear peace over a buckler, surely.

LYSISTRATA. What other oath do you prefer?

CALONICÉ. Let's take a white horse, and sacrifice it, and swear on its entrails.

LYSISTRATA. But where get a white horse from?

CALONICÉ. Well, what oath shall we take then?

LYSISTRATA. Listen to me. Let's set a great black bowl on the ground; let's sacrifice a skin of Thasian wine into it, and take oath not to add one single drop of water.

LAMPITO. Ah! that's an oath pleases me more than I can say.

LYSISTRATA. Let them bring me a bowl and a skin of wine.

CALONICÉ. Ah! my dears, what a noble big bowl! what a delight 'twill be to empty it!

LYSISTRATA. Set the bowl down on the ground, and lay your hands on the victim. . . . Almighty goddess, Persuasion, and thou, bowl, boon comrade of joy and merriment, receive this our sacrifice, and be propitious to us poor women!

CALONICÉ. Oh! the fine red blood! how well it flows!

LAMPITO. And what a delicious savour, by the goddesses twain!

LYSISTRATA. Now, my dears, let me swear first, if you please.



CALONICÉ. No, by the goddess of love, let us decide that by lot.

LYSISTRATA. Come, then, Lampito, and all of you, put your hands to the bowl; and do you, Calonicé, repeat in the name of all the solemn terms I am going to recite. Then you must all swear, and pledge yourselves by the same promises,—*I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .*

CALONICÉ. *I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *Albeit he come to me with strength and passion . . .*

CALONICÉ. *Albeit he come to me with strength and passion . . .* Oh! Lysistrata, I cannot bear it!

LYSISTRATA. *I will live at home in perfect chastity . . .*

CALONICÉ. *I will live at home in perfect chastity . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .*

CALONICÉ. *Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.*

CALONICÉ. *To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.*

LYSISTRATA. *Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .*

CALONICÉ. *Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *And if he has me by force . . .*

CALONICÉ. *And if he has me by force . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .*

CALONICÉ. *I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *I will not aid him in any way . . .*

CALONICÉ. *I will not aid him in any way . . .*

LYSISTRATA. *Nor will I crouch like carven lions on a knife-handle.*

CALONICÉ. *Nor will I crouch like carven lions on a knife-handle.*

LYSISTRATA. *And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.*

CALONICÉ. *And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.*

LYSISTRATA. *But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.*

CALONICÉ. *But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.*

LYSISTRATA. Will ye all take this oath?

MYRRHINÉ. Yes, yes!

LYSISTRATA. Then lo! I'll now consume this remnant. (*She drinks.*)

CALONICÉ. Enough, enough, my dear; now let us all drink in turn to cement our friendship.

LAMPITO. Hark! what do those cries mean?

LYSISTRATA. 'Tis what I was telling you; the women have just occupied the Acropolis. So now, Lampito, do you return to Sparta to organize the plot, while your comrades here remain as hostages. For ourselves, let us away to join the rest in the citadel, and let us push the bolts well home.

CALONICÉ. But don't you think the men will march up against us?

LYSISTRATA. I laugh at them. Neither threats nor flames shall force our doors; they shall open only on the conditions I have named.

CALONICÉ. Yes, yes, by Aphrodité! let us keep up our old-time repute for obstinacy and spite.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Go easy, Draces, go easy; why, your shoulder is all chafed by these plaguey heavy olive stocks. But forward still, forward, man, as needs must. What unlooked-for things do happen, to be sure, in a long life! Ah! Strymodorus, who would ever have thought it? Here we have the women, who used, for our misfortune, to eat our bread and live in our houses, daring nowadays to lay hands on the holy image of the goddess, to seize the Acropolis and draw bars and bolts to keep any from entering! Come, Philurgus man, let's hurry thither; let's lay our faggots all about the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn with our hands these vile conspiratresses, one and all—and Lycon's wife, Lysistrata, first and foremost! Nay, by Demeter, never will I let 'em laugh at me, whiles I have a breath left in my body. Cleomenes himself, the first who ever seized our citadel, had to quit it to his sore dishonour; spite his Lacedæmonian pride, he had to deliver me up his arms and slink off with a single garment to his back. My word! but he was filthy and ragged! and what an unkempt beard, to be sure! He had not had a bath for six long years! Oh! but that was a mighty siege! Our men were ranged seventeen deep before the gate, and never left their posts, even to sleep. These women, these enemies of Euripides and all the gods, shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate insolence? else let them tear down my trophies of Marathon. But look ye, to finish our toilsome climb, we have only this last steep bit left to mount. Verily 'tis no easy job without beasts of burden, and how these logs do bruise my shoulder! Still let us on, and blow up our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination. Phew! phew! (*blows the fire.*) Oh! dear! what a dreadful smoke! it bites my eyes like a mad dog. It is Lemnos fire for sure, or it would never devour my eyelids like this. Come on, Laches, let's hurry, let's bring succour to the goddess; it's now or never! Phew! phew! (*blows the fire.*) Oh! dear! what a confounded smoke!—There now, there's our fire all bright and burning, thank the gods! Now, why not first put down our loads here, then take a vine-branch, light it at the brazier and hurl it at the gate by way of battering-ram? If they don't answer our summons by pulling back the bolts, then we set fire to the woodwork, and the smoke will choke 'em. Ye gods! what a smoke! Pfaugh! Is there never a Samos general will help me unload my burden?—Ah! it shall not gall my shoulder any more. (*Tosses down his wood.*) Come, brazier, do your duty, make the embers flare, that I may kindle a brand; I want to be the first to hurl one. Aid me, heavenly Victory; let us punish for their insolent audacity the women who have seized our citadel, and may we raise a trophy of triumph for success!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Oh! my dears, methinks I see fire and smoke; can it be a conflagration? Let us hurry all we can. Fly, fly, Nicodicé, ere Calycé and Crityllé perish in the fire, or are stifled in the smoke raised by these accursed old men and their pitiless laws. But, great gods, can it be I come too late? Rising at dawn, I had the utmost trouble to fill this vessel at the fountain. Oh! what a crowd there was, and what a din! What a rattling of water-pots! Servants and slave-girls pushed and thronged me! However, here I have it full at last; and I am running to carry the water to my fellow-townswomen, whom our foes are plotting to burn alive. News has been brought us that a company

of old, doddering greybeards, loaded with enormous faggots, as if they wanted to heat a furnace, have taken the field, vomiting dreadful threats, crying that they must reduce to ashes these horrible women. Suffer them not, oh! goddess, but, of thy grace, may I see Athens and Greece cured of their warlike folly. 'Tis to this end, oh! thou guardian deity of our city, goddess of the golden crest, that they have seized thy sanctuary. Be their friend and ally, Athené, and if any man hurl against them lighter firebrands, aid us to carry water to extinguish them.

STRATYLLIS. Let me be, I say. Oh! oh! (*She calls for help.*)

CHORUS OF WOMEN. What is this I see, ye wretched old men? Honest and pious folk ye cannot be who act so vilely.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah, ha! here's something new! a swarm of women stand posted outside to defend the gates!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Ah! ah! we frighten you, do we; we seem a mighty host, yet you do not see the ten-thousandth part of our sex.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ho, Phædrias! shall we stop their cackle? Suppose one of us were to break a stick across their backs, eh?

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Let us set down our water-pots on the ground, to be out of the way, if they should dare to offer us violence.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Let someone knock out two or three teeth for them, as they did to Bupalus; they won't talk so loud then.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Come on then; I wait you with unflinching foot, and I will snap you off like a bitch.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Silence! ere my stick has cut short your days.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Now, just you dare to touch Stratyllis with the tip of your finger!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. And if I batter you to pieces with my fists, what will you do?

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I will tear out your lungs and entrails with my teeth.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Oh! what a clever poet is Euripides! how well he says that woman is the most shameless of animals.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Let's pick up our water-jars again, Rhodippé.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah! accursed harlot, what do you mean to do here with your water?

CHORUS OF WOMEN. And you, old death-in-life, with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself?

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. I am going to build you a pyre to roast your female friends upon.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. And I,—I am going to put out your fire.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. You put out my fire—you!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Yes, you shall soon see.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I am getting you a bath ready to clean off the filth.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. A bath for me, you dirty slut, you!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Yes, indeed, a nuptial bath—he, he!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Do you hear that? What insolence!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I am a free woman, I tell you.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. I will make you hold your tongue, never fear!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Ah, ha! you shall never sit more amongst the Heliasts.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Burn off her hair for her!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Water, do your office! (*The women pitch the water in their water-pots over the old men.*)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Was it hot?

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Hot, great gods! Enough, enough!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I'm watering you, to make you bloom afresh.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Alas! I am too dry! Ah, me! how I am trembling with cold!

MAGISTRATE. These women, have they made din enough, I wonder, with their tambourines? bewept Adonis enough upon their terraces? I was listening to the speeches last assembly day, and Demostratus, whom heaven confound! was saying we must all go over to Sicily—and lo! his wife was dancing round repeating: Alas! alas! Adonis, woe is me for Adonis! Demostratus was saying we must levy hoplites at Zacynthus—and lo! his wife, more than half drunk, was screaming on the house-roof: "Weep, weep for Adonis!"—while that infamous *Mad Ox* was bellowing away on his side.—Do ye not blush, ye women, for your wild and uproarious doings?

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. But you don't know all their effrontery yet! They abused and insulted us; then soused us with the water in their water-pots, and have set us wringing out our clothes, for all the world as if we had beppised ourselves.

MAGISTRATE. And 'tis well done too, by Posidon! We men must share the blame of their ill conduct; it is we who teach them to love riot and dissoluteness and sow the seeds of wickedness in their hearts. You see a husband go into a shop: "Look you, jeweller," says he, "you remember the necklace you made for my wife. Well, t'other evening, when she was dancing, the catch came open. Now, I am bound to start for Salamis; will you make it convenient to go up to-night to make her fastening secure?" Another will go to a cobbler, a great, strong fellow, with a great, long tool, and tell him: "The strap of one of my wife's sandals presses her little toe, which is extremely sensitive; come in about midday to supple the thing and stretch it." Now see the results. Take my own case—as a Magistrate I have enlisted rowers; I want money to pay 'em, and lo! the women clap to the door in my face. But why do we stand here with arms crossed? Bring me a crowbar; I'll chastise their insolence!—Ho! there, my fine fellow! (*addressing one of his attendant officers*) what are you gaping at the crows about? looking for a tavern, I suppose, eh? Come, crow-bars here, and force open the gates. I will put a hand to the work myself.

LYSISTRATA. No need to force the gates; I am coming out—here I am. And why bolts and bars? What we want here is not bolts and bars and locks, but common sense.

MAGISTRATE. Really, my fine lady! Where is my officer? I want him to tie that woman's hands behind her back.



LYSISTRATA. By Artemis, the virgin goddess! if he touches me with the tip of his finger, officer of the public peace though he be, let him look out for himself!

MAGISTRATE (*to the officer*). How now, are you afraid? Seize her, I tell you, round the body. Two of you at her, and have done with it!

FIRST WOMAN. By Pandrosos! if you lay a hand on her, I'll trample you underfoot till you spill your guts!

MAGISTRATE. Oh, there! my guts! Where is my other officer? Bind that minx first, who speaks so prettily!

SECOND WOMAN. By Phœbé, if you touch her with one finger, you'd better call quick for a surgeon!

MAGISTRATE. What do you mean? Officer, where are you got to? Lay hold of her. Oh! but I'm going to stop your foolishness for you all!

THIRD WOMAN. By the Tauric Artemis, if you go near her, I'll pull out your hair, scream as you like.

MAGISTRATE. Ah! miserable man that I am! My own officers desert me. What ho! are we to let ourselves be bested by a mob of women? Ho! Scythians mine, close up your ranks, and forward!

LYSISTRATA. By the holy goddesses! you'll have to make acquaintance with four companies of women, ready for the fray and well armed to boot.

MAGISTRATE. Forward, Scythians, and bind them!

LYSISTRATA. Forward, my gallant companions; march forth, ye vendors of grain and eggs, garlic and vegetables, keepers of taverns and bakeries, wrench and strike and tear; come, a torrent of invective and insult! (*They beat the officers.*) Enough, enough! now retire, never rob the vanquished!

MAGISTRATE. Here's a fine exploit for my officers!

LYSISTRATA. Ah, ha! so you thought you had only to do with a set of slave-women! you did not know the ardour that fills the bosom of free-born dames.

MAGISTRATE. Ardour! yes, by Apollo, ardour enough—especially for the wine-cup!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Sir, sir! what use of words? they are of no avail with wild beasts of this sort. Don't you know how they have just washed us down—and with no very fragrant soap!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. What would you have? You should never have laid rash hands on us. If you start afresh, I'll knock your eyes out. My delight is to stay at home as coy as a young maid, without hurting anybody or moving any more than a milestone; but 'ware the wasps, if you go stirring up the wasps' nest!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah! great gods! how get the better of these ferocious creatures? 'tis past all bearing! But come, let us try to find out the reason of the dreadful scourge. With what end in view have they seized the citadel of Cranaus, the sacred shrine that is raised upon the inaccessible rock of the Acropolis? Question them; be cautious and not too credulous. 'Twould be culpable negligence not to pierce the mystery, if we may.

MAGISTRATE (*addressing the women*). I would ask you first why ye have barred our gates.

LYSISTRATA. To seize the treasury; no more money, no more war.

MAGISTRATE. Then money is the cause of the War?

LYSISTRATA. And of all our troubles. 'Twas to find occasion to steal that Pisander and all the other agitators were forever raising revolutions. Well and good! but they'll never get another drachma here.

MAGISTRATE. What do you propose to do then, pray?

LYSISTRATA. You ask me that! Why, we propose to administer the treasury ourselves.

MAGISTRATE. *You* do?

LYSISTRATA. What is there in that to surprise you? Do we not administer the budget of household expenses?

MAGISTRATE. But that is not the same thing.

LYSISTRATA. How so—not the same thing?

MAGISTRATE. It is the treasury supplies the expenses of the War.

LYSISTRATA. That's our first principle—no War!

MAGISTRATE. What! and the safety of the city?

LYSISTRATA. We will provide for that.

MAGISTRATE. *You*?

LYSISTRATA. Yes, just we.

MAGISTRATE. What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA. Yes, we're going to save you, whether you will or no.

MAGISTRATE. Oh! the impudence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA. You seem annoyed! but there, you've got to come to it.

MAGISTRATE. But 'tis the very height of iniquity!

LYSISTRATA. We're going to save you, my man.

MAGISTRATE. But if I don't want to be saved?

LYSISTRATA. Why, all the more reason!

MAGISTRATE. But what a notion, to concern yourselves with questions of Peace and War!

LYSISTRATA. We will explain our idea.

MAGISTRATE. Out with it then; quick, or . . . (*threatening her*).

LYSISTRATA. Listen, and never a movement, please!

MAGISTRATE. Oh! it is too much for me! I cannot keep my temper!

A WOMAN. Then look out for yourself; you have more to fear than we have.

MAGISTRATE. Stop your croaking, old crow, you! (*To* LYSISTRATA.) Now you, say your say.

LYSISTRATA. Willingly. All the long time the War has lasted, we have endured in modest silence all you men did; we never allowed ourselves to open our lips. We were far from satisfied, for we knew how things were going; often in our homes we would hear you discussing, upside down and inside out, some important turn of affairs. Then with sad hearts, but smiling lips, we would ask you: Well, in to-day's Assembly did they vote Peace?—But, "Mind your own business!" the husband would growl, "Hold your tongue, do!" And I would say no more.

A WOMAN. I would not have held my tongue though, not I!

MAGISTRATE. You would have been reduced to silence by blows then.



LYSISTRATA. Well, for my part, I would say no more. But presently I would come to know you had arrived at some fresh decision more fatally foolish than ever. "Ah! my dear man," I would say, "what madness next!" But he would only look at me askance and say: "Just weave your web, do; else your cheeks will smart for hours. War is men's business!"

MAGISTRATE. Bravo! well said indeed!

LYSISTRATA. How now, wretched man? not to let us contend against your follies, was bad enough! But presently we heard you asking out loud in the open street: "Is there never a man left in Athens?" and, "No, not one, not one," you were assured in reply. Then, then we made up our minds without more delay to make common cause to save Greece. Open your ears to our wise counsels and hold your tongues, and we may yet put things on a better footing.

MAGISTRATE. *You* put things indeed! Oh! 'tis too much! The insolence of the creatures! Silence, I say.

LYSISTRATA. Silence yourself!

MAGISTRATE. May I die a thousand deaths ere I obey one who wears a veil!

LYSISTRATA. If that's all that troubles you, here, take my veil, wrap it round your head, and hold your tongue. Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool, munch beans. The War shall be women's business.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Lay aside your water-pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions. For myself, I will never weary of the dance; my knees will never grow stiff with fatigue. I will brave everything with my dear allies, on whom Nature has lavished virtue, grace, boldness, cleverness, and whose wisely directed energy is going to save the State. Oh! my good, gallant Lysistrata, and all my friends, be ever like a bundle of nettles; never let your anger slacken; the winds of fortune blow our way.

LYSISTRATA. May gentle Love and the sweet Cyprian Queen shower seductive charms on our bosoms and all our person. If only we may stir so amorous a feeling among the men that they stand firm as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peace-makers among the Greeks.

MAGISTRATE. How will that be, pray?

LYSISTRATA. To begin with, we shall not see you any more running like mad fellows to the Market holding lance in fist.

A WOMAN. That will be something gained, anyway, by the Paphian goddess, it will!

LYSISTRATA. Now we see 'em, mixed up with saucepans and kitchen stuff, armed to the teeth, looking like wild Corybantes!

MAGISTRATE. Why, of course; that's how brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA. Oh! but what a funny sight, to behold a man wearing a Gorgon's-head buckler coming along to buy fish!

A WOMAN. T'other day in the Market I saw a phylarch with flowing ring-lets; he was a-horseback, and was pouring into his helmet the broth he had just bought at an old dame's still. There was a Thracian warrior too, who was brandishing his lance like Tereus in the play; he had scared a good woman selling figs into a perfect panic, and was gobbling up all her ripest fruit.

MAGISTRATE. And how, pray, would you propose to restore peace and order in all the countries of Greece?

LYSISTRATA. 'Tis the easiest thing in the world!

MAGISTRATE. Come, tell us how; I am curious to know.

LYSISTRATA. When we are winding thread, and it is tangled, we pass the spool across and through the skein, now this way, now that way; even so, to finish off the War, we shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters.

MAGISTRATE. And 'tis with your yarn, and your skeins, and your spools, you think to appease so many bitter enmities, you silly women?

LYSISTRATA. If only you had common sense, you would always do in politics the same as we do with our yarn.

MAGISTRATE. Come, how is that, eh?

LYSISTRATA. First we wash the yarn to separate the grease and filth; do the same with all bad citizens, sort them out and drive them forth with rods—'tis the refuse of the city. Then for all such as come crowding up in search of employments and offices, we must card them thoroughly; then, to bring them all to the same standard, pitch them pell-mell into the same basket, resident aliens or no, allies, debtors to the State, all mixed up together. Then as for our Colonies, you must think of them as so many isolated hanks; find the ends of the separate threads, draw them to a centre here, wind them into one, make one great hank of the lot, out of which the Public can weave itself a good, stout tunic.

MAGISTRATE. Is it not a sin and a shame to see them carding and winding the State, these women who have neither art nor part in the burdens of the War?

LYSISTRATA. What! wretched man! why, 'tis a far heavier burden to us than to you. In the first place, we bear sons who go off to fight far away from Athens.

MAGISTRATE. Enough said! do not recall sad and sorry memories!

LYSISTRATA. Then secondly, instead of enjoying the pleasures of love and making the best of our youth and beauty, we are left to languish far from our husbands, who are all with the army. But say no more of ourselves; what afflicts me is to see our girls growing old in lonely grief.

MAGISTRATE. Don't the men grow old too?

LYSISTRATA. That is not the same thing. When the soldier returns from the wars, even though he has white hair, he very soon finds a young wife. But a woman has only one summer; if she does not make hay while the sun shines, no one will afterwards have anything to say to her, and she spends her days consulting oracles that never send her a husband.

MAGISTRATE. But the old man who can still do it . . .

LYSISTRATA. But you, why don't you get done with it and die? You are rich; go buy yourself a bier, and I will knead you a honey-cake for Cerberus. Here, take this garland. (*Drenching him with water.*)

FIRST WOMAN. And this one too. (*Drenching him with water.*)

SECOND WOMAN. And these fillets. (*Drenching him with water.*)

LYSISTRATA. What do you lack more? Step aboard the boat; Charon is waiting for you, you're keeping him from pushing off.

MAGISTRATE. To treat me so scurvily! What an insult! I will go show myself to my fellow-magistrates just as I am.

LYSISTRATA. What! are you blaming us for not having exposed you according to custom? Nay, console yourself; we will not fail to offer up the third-day sacrifice for you, first thing in the morning.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Awake, friends of freedom; let us hold ourselves aye ready to act. I suspect a mighty peril; I foresee another Tyranny like Hippias'. I am sore afraid the Laconians assembled here with Cleisthenes have, by a stratagem of war, stirred up these women, enemies of the gods, to seize upon our treasury and the funds whereby I lived. Is it not a sin and a shame for them to interfere in advising the citizens, to prate of shields and lances, and to ally themselves with Laconians, fellows I trust no more than I would so many famished wolves? The whole thing, my friends, is nothing else but an attempt to re-establish Tyranny. But I will never submit; I will be on my guard for the future; I will always carry a blade hidden under myrtle boughs; I will post myself in the Public Square under arms, shoulder to shoulder with Aristogiton; and now, to make a start, I must just break a few of that cursed old jade's teeth yonder.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Nay, never play the brave man, else when you go back home, your own mother won't know you. But, dear friends and allies, first let us lay our burdens down; then, citizens all, hear what I have to say. I have useful counsel to give our city, which deserves it well at my hands for the brilliant distinctions it has lavished on my girlhood. At seven years of age, I was bearer of the sacred vessels; at ten, I pounded barley for the altar of Athené; next, clad in a robe of yellow silk, I was *little bear* to Artemis at the Brauronia; presently, grown a tall, handsome maiden, they put a necklace of dried figs about my neck, and I was Basket-Bearer. So surely I am bound to give my best advice to Athens. What matters that I was born a woman, if I can cure your misfortunes? I pay my share of tolls and taxes, by giving men to the State. But you, you miserable greybeards, you contribute nothing to the public charges; on the contrary, you have wasted the treasure of our forefathers, as it was called, the treasure amassed in the days of the Persian Wars. You pay nothing at all in return; and into the bargain you endanger our lives and liberties by your mistakes. Have you one word to say for yourselves? . . . Ah! don't irritate me, you there, or I'll lay my slipper across your jaws; and it's pretty heavy.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Outrage upon outrage! things are going from bad to worse. Let us punish the minxes, every one of us that has a man's appendages to boast of. Come, off with our tunics, for a man must savour of manhood; come, my friends, let us strip naked from head to foot. Courage, I say, we who in our day garrisoned Lipsydrion; let us be young again, and shake off eld. If we give them the least hold over us, 'tis all up! their audacity will know no bounds! We shall see them building ships, and fighting sea-fights,

like Artemisia; nay, if they want to mount and ride as cavalry, we had best cashier the knights, for indeed women excel in riding, and have a fine, firm seat for the gallop. Just think of all those squadrons of Amazons Micon has painted for us engaged in hand-to-hand combat with men. Come then, we must e'en fit collars to all these willing necks.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. By the blessed goddesses, if you anger me, I will let loose the beast of my evil passions, and a very hailstorm of blows will set you yelling for help. Come, dames, off tunics, and quick's the word; women must scent the savour of women in the throes of passion. . . . Now just you dare to measure strength with me, old greybeard, and I warrant you you'll never eat garlic or black beans more. No, not a word! my anger is at boiling point, and I'll do with you what the beetle did with the eagle's eggs. I laugh at your threats, so long as I have on my side Lampito here, and the noble Theban, my dear Ismenia. . . . Pass decree on decree, you can do us no hurt, you wretch abhorred of all your fellows. Why, only yesterday, on occasion of the feast of Hecaté, I asked my neighbours of Bœotia for one of their daughters for whom my girls have a lively liking—a fine, fat eel to wit; and if they did not refuse, all along of your silly decrees! We shall never cease to suffer the like, till someone gives you a neat trip-up and breaks your neck for you!

*(Several days are supposed to have elapsed.)*

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*addressing* LYSISTRATA). You, Lysistrata, you who are leader of our glorious enterprise, why do I see you coming towards me with so gloomy an air?

LYSISTRATA. 'Tis the behaviour of these naughty women, 'tis the female heart and female weakness so discourages me.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Tell us, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA. I only tell the simple truth.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. What has happened so disconcerting? Come, tell your friends.

LYSISTRATA. Oh! the thing is so hard to tell—yet so impossible to conceal.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Nay, never seek to hide any ill that has befallen our cause.

LYSISTRATA. To blurt it out in a word—we are in passion!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Oh! Zeus, oh! Zeus!

LYSISTRATA. What use calling upon Zeus? The thing is even as I say. I cannot stop them any longer from lusting after the men. They are all for deserting. The first I caught was slipping out by the postern gate near the cave of Pan; another was letting herself down by a rope and pulley; a third was busy preparing her escape; while a fourth, perched on a bird's back, was just taking wing for Orsilochus' house, when I seized her by the hair. One and all, they are inventing excuses to be off home. Look! there goes one, trying to get out! Halloa there! whither away so fast?

FIRST WOMAN. I want to go home; I have some Miletus wool in the house, which is getting all eaten up by the worms.



LYSISTRATA. Bah! you and your worms! go back, I say!

FIRST WOMAN. I will return immediately, I swear I will by the two goddesses! I only have just to spread it out on the bed.

LYSISTRATA. You shall not do anything of the kind! I say, you shall not go.

FIRST WOMAN. Must I leave my wool to spoil then?

LYSISTRATA. Yes, if need be.

SECOND WOMAN. Unhappy woman that I am! Alas for my flax! I've left it at home unstript!

LYSISTRATA. So, here's another trying to escape to go home and strip her flax forsooth!

SECOND WOMAN. Oh! I swear by the goddess of light, the instant I have put it in condition I will come straight back.

LYSISTRATA. You shall do nothing of the kind! If once you began, others would want to follow suit.

THIRD WOMAN. Oh! goddess divine, Ilithyia, patroness of women in labour, stay, stay the birth, till I have reached a spot less hallowed than Athené's Mount!

LYSISTRATA. What mean you by these silly tales?

THIRD WOMAN. I am going to have a child—now, this minute.

LYSISTRATA. But you were not pregnant yesterday!

THIRD WOMAN. Well, I am to-day. Oh! let me go in search of the midwife, Lysistrata, quick, quick!

LYSISTRATA. What is this fable you are telling me? Ah! what have you got there so hard?

THIRD WOMAN. A male child.

LYSISTRATA. No, no, by Aphrodité! nothing of the sort! Why, it feels like something hollow—a pot or a kettle. Oh! you baggage, if you have not got the sacred helmet of Pallas—and you said you were with child!

THIRD WOMAN. And so I am, by Zeus, I am!

LYSISTRATA. Then why this helmet, pray?

THIRD WOMAN. For fear my pains should seize me in the Acropolis; I mean to lay my eggs in this helmet, as the doves do.

LYSISTRATA. Excuses and pretences every word! the thing's as clear as daylight. Anyway, you must stay here now till the fifth day, your day of purification.

THIRD WOMAN. I cannot sleep any more in the Acropolis, now I have seen the snake that guards the Temple.

FOURTH WOMAN. Ah! and those confounded owls with their dismal hooting! I cannot get a wink of rest, and I'm just dying of fatigue.

LYSISTRATA. You wicked women, have done with your falsehoods! You want your husbands, that's plain enough. But don't you think they want you just as badly? They are spending dreadful nights, oh! I know that well enough. But hold out, my dears, hold out! A little more patience, and the victory will be ours. An Oracle promises us success, if only we remain united. Shall I repeat the words?

FIRST WOMAN. Yes, tell us what the Oracle declares.

LYSISTRATA. Silence then! Now—"Whenas the swallows, fleeing before the hoopoes, shall have all flocked together in one place, and shall refrain them from all amorous commerce, then will be the end of all the ills of life; yea, and Zeus, which doth thunder in the skies, shall set above what was erst below. . . ."

CHORUS OF WOMEN. What! shall the men be underneath?

LYSISTRATA. "But if dissension do arise among the swallows, and they take wing from the holy Temple, 'twill be said there is never a more wanton bird in all the world."

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Ye gods! the prophecy is clear. Nay, never let us be cast down by calamity! let us be brave to bear, and go back to our posts. 'Twere shameful indeed not to trust the promises of the Oracle.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. I want to tell you a fable they used to relate to me when I was a little boy. This is it: Once upon a time there was a young man called Melanion, who hated the thought of marriage so sorely that he fled away to the wilds. So he dwelt in the mountains, wove himself nets, kept a dog and caught hares. He never, never came back, he had such a horror of women. As chaste as Melanion, we loathe the jades just as much as he did.

AN OLD MAN. You dear old woman, I would fain kiss you.

A WOMAN. I will set you crying without onions.

OLD MAN. . . . And give you a sound kicking.

A WOMAN. Ah, ha! what a dense forest you have there! (*Pointing.*)

OLD MAN. So was Myronides one of the best-bearded of men o' this side; his backside was all black, and he terrified his enemies as much as Phormio.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I want to tell you a fable too, to match yours about Melanion. Once there was a certain man called Timon, a tough customer, and a whimsical, a true son of the Furies, with a face that seemed to glare out of a thorn-bush. He withdrew from the world because he couldn't abide bad men, after vomiting a thousand curses at 'em. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

A WOMAN. Suppose I up and broke your jaw for you!

OLD MAN. I am not a bit afraid of you.

A WOMAN. Suppose I let fly a good kick at you?

OLD MAN. I should see your backside then.

WOMAN. You would see that, for all my age, it is very well attended to.

LYSISTRATA. Ho there! come quick, come quick!

FIRST WOMAN. What is it? Why these cries?

LYSISTRATA. A man! a man! I see him approaching all afire with the flames of love. Oh! divine Queen of Cyprus, Paphos and Cythera, I pray you still be propitious to our emprise.

FIRST WOMAN. Where is he, this unknown foe?

LYSISTRATA. Yonder—beside the Temple of Demeter.

FIRST WOMAN. Yes, indeed, I see him; but who is it?

LYSISTRATA. Look, look! does any of you recognize him?

FIRST WOMAN. I do, I do! 'tis my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA. To work then! Be it your task to inflame and torture and tor-



ment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favour,—always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine-bowl.

MYRRHINÉ. Have no fear, I undertake the work.

LYSISTRATA. Well, I will stay here to help you cajole the man and set his passions aflame. The rest of you, withdraw.

CINESIAS. Alas! alas! how I am tortured by spasm and rigid convulsion! Oh! I am racked on the wheel!

LYSISTRATA. Who is this that dares to pass our lines?

CINESIAS. It is I.

LYSISTRATA. What, a man?

CINESIAS. Yes, no doubt about it, a man!

LYSISTRATA. Begone!

CINESIAS. But who are you that thus repulses me?

LYSISTRATA. The sentinel of the day.

CINESIAS. By all the gods, call Myrrhiné hither.

LYSISTRATA. Call Myrrhiné hither, quotha? And pray, who are you?

CINESIAS. I am her husband, Cinesias, son of Peon.

LYSISTRATA. Ah! good day, my dear friend. Your name is not unknown amongst us. Your wife has it forever on her lips; and she never touches an egg or an apple without saying: "'Twill be for Cinesias."

CINESIAS. Really and truly?

LYSISTRATA. Yes, indeed, by Aphrodité! And if we fall to talking of men, quick your wife declares: "Oh! all the rest, they're good for nothing compared with Cinesias."

CINESIAS. Oh! I beseech you, go and call her to me.

LYSISTRATA. And what will you give me for my trouble?

CINESIAS. Anything I've got, if you like. I will give you what I have there!

LYSISTRATA. Well, well, I will tell her to come.

CINESIAS. Quick, oh! be quick! Life has no more charms for me since she left my house. I am sad, sad, when I go indoors; it all seems so empty; my victuals have lost their savour. Desire is eating out my heart!

MYRRHINÉ. I love him, oh! I love him; but he won't let himself be loved. No! I shall not come.

CINESIAS. Myrrhiné, my little darling Myrrhiné, what are you saying? Come down to me quick.

MYRRHINÉ. No indeed, not I.

CINESIAS. I call you, Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné; will you not come?

MYRRHINÉ. Why should you call me? You do not want me.

CINESIAS. Not want you! Why, here I stand, stiff with desire!

MYRRHINÉ. Good-bye.

CINESIAS. Oh! Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné, in our child's name, hear me; at any rate hear the child! Little lad, call your mother.

CHILD. Mammy, mammy, mammy!

CINESIAS. There, listen! Don't you pity the poor child? It's six days now you've never washed and never fed the child.

MYRRHINÉ. Poor darling, your father takes mighty little care of you!

CINESIAS. Come down, dearest, come down for the child's sake.

MYRRHINÉ. Ah! what a thing it is to be a mother! Well, well, we must come down, I suppose.

CINESIAS. Why, how much younger and prettier she looks! And how she looks at me so lovingly! Her cruelty and scorn only redouble my passion.

MYRRHINÉ. You are as sweet as your father is provoking! Let me kiss you, my treasure, mother's darling!

CINESIAS. Ah! what a bad thing it is to let yourself be led away by other women! Why give me such pain and suffering, and yourself into the bargain?

MYRRHINÉ. Hands off, sir!

CINESIAS. Everything is going to rack and ruin in the house.

MYRRHINÉ. I don't care.

CINESIAS. But your web that's all being pecked to pieces by the cocks and hens, don't you care for that?

MYRRHINÉ. Precious little.

CINESIAS. And Aphrodité, whose mysteries you have not celebrated for so long? Oh! won't you come back home?

MYRRHINÉ. No, at least, not till a sound Treaty put an end to the War.

CINESIAS. Well, if you wish it so much, why, we'll make it, your Treaty.

MYRRHINÉ. Well and good! When that's done, I will come home. Till then, I am bound by an oath.

CINESIAS. At any rate, let's have a short time together.

MYRRHINÉ. No, no, no! . . . all the same I cannot say I don't love you.

CINESIAS. You love me? Then why refuse what I ask, my little girl, my sweet Myrrhiné?

MYRRHINÉ. You must be joking! What, before the child!

CINESIAS. Manes, carry the lad home. There, you see, the child is gone; there's nothing to hinder us; let us to work!

MYRRHINÉ. But, miserable man, where, where?

CINESIAS. In the cave of Pan; nothing could be better.

MYRRHINÉ. But how to purify myself, before going back into the citadel?

CINESIAS. Nothing easier! you can wash at the Clepsydra.

MYRRHINÉ. But my oath? Do you want me to perjure myself?

CINESIAS. I take all responsibility; never make yourself anxious.

MYRRHINÉ. Well, I'll be off, then, and find a bed for us.

CINESIAS. Oh! 'tis not worth while; we can lie on the ground surely.

MYRRHINÉ. No, no! bad man as you are, I don't like your lying on the bare earth.

CINESIAS. Ah! how the dear girl loves me!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a bed*). Come, get to bed quick; I am going to undress. But, plague take it, we must get a mattress.

CINESIAS. A mattress! Oh! no, never mind!

MYRRHINÉ. No, by Artemis! lie on the bare sacking, never! That were too squalid.

CINESIAS. A kiss!

MYRRHINÉ. Wait a minute!

CINESIAS. Oh! by the great gods, be quick back!

MYRRHINÉ. Here is a mattress. Lie down, I am just going to undress. But, but you've got no pillow.

CINESIAS. I don't want one, no, no.

MYRRHINÉ. But *I* do.

CINESIAS. Oh, dear, oh, dear! they treat my poor self for all the world like Heracles.

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a pillow*). There, lift your head, dear!

CINESIAS. That's really everything.

MYRRHINÉ. Is it everything, I wonder.

CINESIAS. Come, my treasure.

MYRRHINÉ. I am just unfastening my girdle. But remember what you promised me about making peace; mind you keep your word.

CINESIAS. Yes, yes, upon my life I will.

MYRRHINÉ. Why, you have no blanket.

CINESIAS. Great Zeus! what matter of that? 'tis you I want to love.

MYRRHINÉ. Never fear—directly, directly! I'll be back in no time.

CINESIAS. The woman will kill me with her blankets!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a blanket*). Now, get up for one moment.

CINESIAS. But I tell you, our friend here is all ready!

MYRRHINÉ. Would you like me to scent you?

CINESIAS. No, by Apollo, no, please!

MYRRHINÉ. Yes, by Aphrodité, but I will, whether you wish it or no.

CINESIAS. Ah! great Zeus, may she soon be done!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a flask of perfume*). Hold out your hand; now rub it in.

CINESIAS. Oh! in Apollo's name, I don't much like the smell of it; but perhaps 'twill improve when it's well rubbed in. It does not somehow smack of the marriage bed!

MYRRHINÉ. There, what a scatterbrain I am; if I have not brought Rhodian perfumes!

CINESIAS. Never mind, dearest, let be now.

MYRRHINÉ. You are joking!

CINESIAS. Deuce take the man who first invented perfumes, say I!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with another flask*). Here, take this bottle.

CINESIAS. I have a better all ready for your service, darling. Come, you provoking creature, to bed with you, and don't bring another thing.

MYRRHINÉ. Coming, coming; I'm just slipping off my shoes. Dear boy, will you vote for peace?

CINESIAS. I'll think about it. (*MYRRHINÉ runs away.*) I'm a dead man, she is killing me! She has gone, and left me in torment! I must have someone to love, I must! Ah me! the loveliest of women has choused and cheated me. Poor little lad, how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Cynalopex? quick, man, get him a nurse, do!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Poor, miserable wretch, baulked in your amorous-

ness! what tortures are yours! Ah! you fill me with pity. Could any man's back and loins stand such a strain. He stands stiff and rigid, and there's never a wench to help him!

CINESIAS. Ye gods in heaven, what pains I suffer!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Well, there it is; 'tis her doing, that abandoned hussy!

CINESIAS. Nay, nay! rather say that sweetest, dearest darling.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. That dearest darling? no, no, that hussy, say I! Zeus, thou god of the skies, canst not let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all up into the air, and whirl 'em round, then drop 'em down crash! and impale them on the point of his weapon!

A HERALD. Say, where shall I find the Senate and the Prytanes? I am bearer of despatches.

MAGISTRATE. But are you a man or a Priapus, pray?

HERALD. Oh! but he's mighty simple. I am a herald, of course, I swear I am, and I come from Sparta about making peace.

MAGISTRATE. But look, you are hiding a lance under your clothes, surely.

HERALD. No, nothing of the sort.

MAGISTRATE. Then why do you turn away like that, and hold your cloak out from your body? Have you gotten swellings in the groin with your journey?

HERALD. By the twin brethren! the man's an old maniac.

MAGISTRATE. Ah, ha! my fine lad, why I can see it standing, oh fie!

HERALD. I tell you no! but enough of this foolery.

MAGISTRATE. Well, what is it you have there then?

HERALD. A Lacedæmonian "skytalé."

MAGISTRATE. Oh, indeed, a "skytalé," is it? Well, well, speak out frankly; I know all about these matters. How are things going at Sparta now?

HERALD. Why, everything is turned upside down at Sparta; and all the allies are half dead with lusting. We simply must have Pellené.

MAGISTRATE. What is the reason of it all? Is it the god Pan's doing?

HERALD. No, but Lampito's and the Spartan women's, acting at her instigation; they have denied the men all access to them.

MAGISTRATE. But whatever do you do?

HERALD. We are at our wits' end; we walk bent double, just as if we were carrying lanterns in a wind. The jades have sworn we shall not so much as touch them till we have all agreed to conclude peace.

MAGISTRATE. Ha, ha! So I see now, 'tis a general conspiracy embracing all Greece. Go you back to Sparta and bid them send Envoys with plenary powers to treat for peace. I will urge our Senators myself to name Plenipotentiaries from us; and to persuade them, why, I will show them something else.

HERALD. What could be better? I fly at your command.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. No wild beast is there, no flame of fire, more fierce and untamable than woman; the leopard is less savage and shameless.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. And yet you dare to make war upon me, wretch, when you might have me for your most faithful friend and ally.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Never, never can my hatred cease towards women.



CHORUS OF WOMEN. Well, please yourself. Still I cannot bear to leave you all naked as you are; folks would laugh at you. Come, I am going to put this tunic on you.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. You are right, upon my word! it was only in my confounded fit of rage I took it off.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Now at any rate you look like a man, and they won't make fun of you. Ah! if you had not offended me so badly, I would take out that nasty insect you have in your eye for you.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah! so that's what was annoying me so! Look, here's a ring, just remove the insect, and show it me. By Zeus! it has been hurting my eye this ever so long.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Well, I agree, though your manners are not over and above pleasant. Oh! what a huge great gnat! just look! It's from Tricorysus, for sure.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. A thousand thanks! the creature was digging a regular well in my eye; now it's gone, my tears flow freely.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. I will wipe them for you—bad, naughty man though you are. Now, just one kiss.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. No—a kiss, certainly not!

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Just one, whether you like it or not.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Oh! those confounded women! how they do cajole us! How true the saying: " 'Tis impossible to live with the baggages, impossible to live without 'em!" Come, let us agree for the future not to regard each other any more as enemies; and to clinch the bargain, let us sing a choric song.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. We desire, Athenians, to speak ill of no man; but on the contrary to say much good of everyone, and to *do* the like. We have had enough of misfortunes and calamities. Is there any, man or woman, wants a bit of money—two or three minas or so; well, our purse is full. If only peace is concluded, the borrower will not have to pay back. Also I'm inviting to supper a few Carystian friends, who are excellently well qualified. I have still a drop of good soup left, and a young porker I'm going to kill, and the flesh will be sweet and tender. I shall expect you at my house to-day; but first away to the baths with you, you and your children; then come all of you, ask no one's leave, but walk straight up, as if you were at home; never fear, the door will be . . . shut in your faces!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah! here come the Envoys from Sparta with their long flowing beards; why, you would think they wore a cage between their thighs. (*Enter the Lacedæmonian Envoys.*) Hail to you, first of all, Laconians; then tell us how you fare.

A LACONIAN. No need for many words; you see what a state we are in.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Alas! the situation grows more and more strained! the intensity of the thing is just frightful.

LACONIAN. 'Tis beyond belief. But to work! summon your Commissioners, and let us patch up the best peace we may.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Ah! our men too, like wrestlers in the arena, cannot

endure a rag over their bellies; 'tis an athlete's malady, which only exercise can remedy.

AN ATHENIAN. Can anybody tell us where Lysistrata is? Surely she will have some compassion on our condition.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Look! 'tis the very same complaint. (*Addressing the Athenian.*) Don't you feel of mornings a strong nervous tension?

ATHENIAN. Yes, and a dreadful, dreadful torture it is! Unless peace is made very soon, we shall find no resource but go to Cleisthenes.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Take my advice, and put on your clothes again; one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermæ might see you.

ATHENIAN. You are right.

LACONIAN. Quite right. There, I will slip on my tunic.

ATHENIAN. Oh! what a terrible state we are in! Greeting to you, Laconian fellow-sufferers.

LACONIAN (*addressing one of his countrymen*). Ah! my boy, what a thing it would have been if these fellows had seen us just now when we were on full stand!

ATHENIAN. Speak out, Laconians, what is it brings you here?

LACONIAN. We have come to treat for peace.

ATHENIAN. Well said; we are of the same mind. Better call Lysistrata then; she is the only person will bring us to terms.

LACONIAN. Yes, yes—and Lysistratus into the bargain, if you will.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN. Needless to call her; she has heard your voices, and here she comes.

ATHENIAN. Hail, boldest and bravest of womankind! The time is come to show yourself in turn uncompromising and conciliatory, exacting and yielding, haughty and condescending. Call up all your skill and artfulness. Lo! the foremost men in Hellas, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust you with the task of ending their quarrels.

LYSISTRATA. 'Twill be an easy task—if only they refrain from mutual indulgence in masculine love; if they do, I shall know the fact at once. Now, where is the gentle goddess Peace? Lead hither the Laconian Envoys. But, look you, no roughness or violence; our husbands always behaved so boorishly. Bring them to me with smiles, as women should. If any refuse to give you his hand, then catch him and draw him politely forward. Bring up the Athenians too; you may take them just how you will. Laconians, approach; and you, Athenians, on my other side. Now hearken all! I am but a woman; but I have good common sense; Nature has dowered me with discriminating judgment, which I have yet further developed, thanks to the wise teachings of my father and the elders of the city. First I must bring a reproach against you that applies equally to both sides. At Olympia, and Thermopylæ, and Delphi, and a score of other places too numerous to mention, you celebrate before the same altars ceremonies common to all Hellenes; yet you go cutting each other's throats, and sacking Hellenic cities, when all the while the Barbarian is yonder threatening you! That is my first point.

ATHENIAN. Ah, ah! concupiscence is killing me!



LYSISTRATA. Now 'tis to you I address myself, Laconians. Have you forgotten how Periclides, your own countryman, sat a suppliant before our altars? How pale he was in his purple robes! He had come to crave an army of us; 'twas the time when Messenia was pressing you sore, and the Sea-god was shaking the earth. Cimon marched to your aid at the head of four thousand hoplites, and saved Lacedæmon. And, after such a service as that, you ravage the soil of your benefactors!

ATHENIAN. They do wrong, very wrong, Lysistrata.

LACONIAN. We do wrong, very wrong. Ah! great gods! what lovely thighs she has!

LYSISTRATA. And now a word to the Athenians. Have you no memory left of how, in the days when ye wore the tunic of slaves, the Laconians came, spear in hand, and slew a host of Thessalians and partisans of Hippias the Tyrant? They, and they only, fought on your side on that eventful day; they delivered you from despotism, and thanks to them our Nation could change the short tunic of the slave for the long cloak of the free man.

LACONIAN. I have never seen a woman of more gracious dignity.

ATHENIAN. I have never seen a woman with a finer body!

LYSISTRATA. Bound by such ties of mutual kindness, how can you bear to be at war? Stop, stay the hateful strife, be reconciled; what hinders you?

LACONIAN. We are quite ready, if they will give us back our rampart.

LYSISTRATA. What rampart, my dear man?

LACONIAN. Pylos, which we have been asking for and craving for ever so long.

ATHENIAN. In the Sea-god's name, you shall never have it!

LYSISTRATA. Agree, my friends, agree.

ATHENIAN. But then what city shall we be able to stir up trouble in?

LYSISTRATA. Ask for another place in exchange.

ATHENIAN. Ah! that's the ticket! Well, to begin with, give us Echinus, the Maliac gulf adjoining, and the two legs of Megara.

LACONIAN. Oh! surely, surely not all that, my dear sir.

LYSISTRATA. Come to terms; never make a difficulty of two legs more or less!

ATHENIAN. Well, I'm ready now to off coat and cultivate my land.

LACONIAN. And I too, to dung it to start with.

LYSISTRATA. That's just what you shall do, once peace is signed. So, if you really want to make it, go consult your allies about the matter.

ATHENIAN. What allies, I should like to know? Why, we are *all* on the stand; not one but is mad to be mating. What we all want, is to be abed with our wives; how should our allies fail to second our project?

LACONIAN. And ours the same, for certain sure!

ATHENIAN. The Carystians first and foremost, by the gods!

LYSISTRATA. Well said, indeed! Now be off to purify yourselves for entering the Acropolis, where the women invite you to supper; we will empty our provision baskets to do you honour. At table, you will exchange oaths and pledges; then each man will go home with his wife.

ATHENIAN. Come along then, and as quick as may be.

LACONIAN. Lead on; I'm your man.

ATHENIAN. Quick, quick's the word, say I.

CHORUS OF WOMEN. Embroidered stuffs, and dainty tunics, and flowing gowns, and golden ornaments, everything I have, I offer them you with all my heart; take them all for your children, for your girls, against they are chosen "basket-bearers" to the goddess. I invite you every one to enter, come in and choose whatever you will; there is nothing so well fastened, you cannot break the seals, and carry away the contents. Look about you everywhere . . . you won't find a blessed thing, unless you have sharper eyes than mine. And if any of you lacks corn to feed his slaves and his young and numerous family, why, I have a few grains of wheat at home; let him take what I have to give, a big twelve-pound loaf included. So let my poorer neighbours all come with bags and wallets; my man, Manes, shall give them corn; but I warn them not to come near my door, or—beware the dog!

A MARKET-LOUNGER. I say, you, open the door!

A SLAVE. Go your way, I tell you. Why, bless me, they're sitting down now; I shall have to singe 'em with my torch to make 'em stir! What an impudent lot of fellows!

MARKET-LOUNGER. I don't mean to budge.

SLAVE. Well, as you *must* stop, and I don't want to offend you—but you'll see some queer sights.

MARKET-LOUNGER. Well and good, I've no objection.

SLAVE. No, no, you must be off—or I'll tear your hair out, I will; be off, I say, and don't annoy the Laconian Envoys; they're just coming out from the banquet-hall.

AN ATHENIAN. Such a merry banquet I've never seen before! The Laco-nians were simply charming. After the drink is in, why, we're all wise men, all. It's only natural, to be sure, for sober, we're all fools. Take my advice, my fellow-countrymen, our Envoys should always be drunk. We go to Sparta; we enter the city sober; why, we must be picking a quarrel directly. We don't understand what they say to us, we imagine a lot they don't say at all, and we report home all wrong, all topsy-turvy. But, look you, to-day it's quite different; we're enchanted whatever happens; instead of Clitagoras, they might sing us Telamon, and we should clap our hands just the same. A perjury or two into the bargain, la! what does that matter to merry companions in their cups?

SLAVE. But here they are back again! Will you begone, you loafing scoundrels.

MARKET-LOUNGER. Ah ha! here's the company coming out already.

A LACONIAN. My dear, sweet friend, come, take your flute in hand; I would fain dance and sing my best in honour of the Athenians and our noble selves.

AN ATHENIAN. Yes, take your flute, i' the gods' name. What a delight to see him dance!

CHORUS OF LACONIANS. Oh Mnemosyné! inspire these men, inspire my muse who knows our exploits and those of the Athenians. With what a god-like ardour did they swoop down at Artemisium on the ships of the Medes! What

a glorious victory was that! For the soldiers of Leonidas, they were like fierce, wild-boars whetting their tusches. The sweat ran down their faces, and drenched all their limbs, for verily the Persians were as many as the sands of the sea-shore. Oh! Artemis, huntress queen, whose arrows pierce the denizens of the woods, virgin goddess, be thou favourable to the Peace we here conclude; through thee may our hearts be long united! May this treaty draw close for ever the bonds of a happy friendship! No more wiles and stratagems! Aid us, oh! aid us, maiden huntress!

LYSISTRATA. All is for the best; and now, Laconians, take your wives away home with you, and you, Athenians, yours. May husband live happily with wife, and wife with husband. Dance, dance, to celebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future.

CHORUS OF ATHENIANS. Appear, appear, dancers, and the Graces with you! Let us invoke, one and all, Artemis, and her heavenly brother, gracious Apollo, patron of the dance, and Dionysus, whose eye darts flame, as he steps forward surrounded by the Mænad maids, and Zeus, who wields the flashing lightning, and his august, thrice-blessed spouse, the Queen of Heaven! These let us invoke, and all the other gods, calling all the inhabitants of the skies to witness the noble Peace now concluded under the fond auspices of Aphrodité. Io Pæan! Io Pæan! dance, leap, as in honour of a victory won. Evoé! Evoé! And you, our Laconian guests, sing us a new and inspiring strain!

CHORUS OF LACONIANS. Leave once more, oh! leave once more the noble height of Taygetus, oh! Muse of Lacedæmon, and join us in singing the praises of Apollo of Amyclæ, and Athena of the Brazen House, and the gallant twin sons of Tyndarus, who practise arms on the banks of Eurotas river. Haste, haste hither with nimble-footed pace, let us sing Sparta, the city that delights in choruses divinely sweet and graceful dances, when our maidens bound lightly by the river side, like frolicsome fillies, beating the ground with rapid steps and shaking their long locks in the wind, as Bacchantes wave their wands in the wild revels of the Wine-god. At their head, oh! chaste and beautiful goddess, daughter of Latona, Artemis, do thou lead the song and dance. A fillet binding thy waving tresses, appear in thy loveliness; leap like a fawn, strike thy divine hands together to animate the dance, and aid us to renown the valiant goddess of battles, great Athené of the Brazen House!

# THE CLOUDS

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

STREPSIADES.

PHIDIPPIDES.

SERVANT OF STREPSIADES.

SOCRATES.

DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES.

JUST DISCOURSE.

UNJUST DISCOURSE.

PASIAS, *a Money-lender.*

PASIAS' WITNESS.

AMYNIAS, *another Money-lender.*

CHÆREPHON.

CHORUS OF CLOUDS.

SCENE:—A sleeping-room in Strepsiades' house; then in front of Socrates' house.

STREPSIADES. Great gods! will these nights never end? will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago and my slaves are snoring still! Ah! 'twas not so formerly. Curses on the War! has it not done me ills enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves. Again there's this brave lad, who never wakes the whole long night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content. Come! let me nestle in well and snore too, if it be possible . . . oh! misery, 'tis vain to think of sleep with all these expenses, this stable, these debts, which are devouring me, thanks to this fine cavalier, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot and to dream of horses! And I, I am nearly dead, when I see the moon bringing the third decade in her train and my liability falling due. . . . Slave! light the lamp and bring me my tablets. Who are all my creditors? Let me see and reckon up the interest. What is it I owe? . . . Twelve minæ to Pasias. . . . What! twelve minæ to Pasias? . . . Why did I borrow these? Ah! I know! 'Twas to buy that thoroughbred, which cost me so dear. How I should have prized the stone that had blinded him!

PHIDIPPIDES (*in his sleep*). That's not fair, Philo! Drive your chariot straight, I say.

STREPSIADES. 'Tis this that is destroying me. He raves about horses, even in his sleep.

PHIDIPPIDES (*still sleeping*). How many times round the track is the race for the chariots of war?

STREPSIADES. 'Tis your own father you are driving to death . . . to ruin.



Come! what debt comes next, after that of Pasias? . . . Three minæ to Amyntas for a chariot and its two wheels.

PHIDIPPIDES (*still asleep*). Give the horse a good roll in the dust and lead him home.

STREPSIADES. Ah! wretched boy! 'tis my money that you are making roll. My creditors have distrained on my goods, and here are others again, who demand security for their interest.

PHIDIPPIDES. (*awaking*). What is the matter with you, father, that you groan and turn about the whole night through?

STREPSIADES. I have a bum-bailiff in the bedclothes biting me.

PHIDIPPIDES. For pity's sake, let me have a little sleep.

STREPSIADES. Very well, sleep on! but remember that all these debts will fall back on your shoulders. Oh! curses on the go-between who made me marry your mother! I lived so happily in the country, a commonplace, everyday life, but a good and easy one—had not a trouble, not a care, was rich in bees, in sheep and in olives. Then forsooth I must marry the niece of Megacles, the son of Megacles; I belonged to the country, she was from the town; she was a haughty, extravagant woman, a true Cœsyra. On the nuptial day, when I lay beside her, I was reeking of the dregs of the wine-cup, of cheese and of wool; she was redolent with essences, saffron, tender kisses, the love of spending, of good cheer and of wanton delights. I will not say she did nothing; no, she worked hard . . . to ruin me, and pretending all the while merely to be showing her the cloak she had woven for me, I said, "Wife, you go too fast about your work, your threads are too closely woven and you use far too much wool."

A SLAVE. There is no more oil in the lamp.

STREPSIADES. Why then did you light such a guzzling lamp? Come here, I am going to beat you!

SLAVE. What for?

STREPSIADES. Because you have put in too thick a wick. . . . Later, when we had this boy, what was to be his name? 'Twas the cause of much quarrelling with my loving wife. She insisted on having some reference to a horse in his name, that he should be called Xanthippus, Charippus or Callippides. I wanted to name him Phidonides after his grandfather. We disputed long, and finally agreed to style him Phidippides. . . . She used to fondle and coax him, saying, "Oh! what a joy it will be to me when you have grown up, to see you, like my father, Megacles, clothed in purple and standing up straight in your chariot driving your steeds toward the town." And I would say to him, "When, like your father, you will go, dressed in a skin, to fetch back your goats from Phellus." Alas! he never listened to me and his madness for horses has shattered my fortune. But by dint of thinking the livelong night, I have discovered a road to salvation, both miraculous and divine. If he will but follow it, I shall be out of my trouble! First, however, he must be awakened, but let it be done as gently as possible. How shall I manage it? Phidippides! my little Phidippides!

PHIDIPPIDES. What is it, father!

STREPSIADES. Kiss me and give me your hand.

PHIDIPPIDES. There! What's it all about?

STREPSIADES. Tell me! do you love me?

PHIDIPPIDES. By Posidon, the equestrian Posidon! yes, I swear I do.

STREPSIADES. Oh, do not, I pray you, invoke this god of horses; 'tis he who is the cause of all my cares. But if you really love me, and with your whole heart, my boy, believe me.

PHIDIPPIDES. Believe you? about what?

STREPSIADES. Alter your habits forthwith and go and learn what I tell you.

PHIDIPPIDES. Say on, what are your orders?

STREPSIADES. Will you obey me ever so little?

PHIDIPPIDES. By Bacchus, I will obey you.

STREPSIADES. Very well then! Look this way. Do you see that little door and that little house?

PHIDIPPIDES. Yes, father. But what are you driving at?

STREPSIADES. That is the school of wisdom. There, they prove that we are coals enclosed on all sides under a vast extinguisher, which is the sky. If well paid, these men also teach one how to gain law-suits, whether they be just or not.

PHIDIPPIDES. What do they call themselves?

STREPSIADES. I do not know exactly, but they are deep thinkers and most admirable people.

PHIDIPPIDES. Bah! the wretches! I know them; you mean those quacks with livid faces, those barefoot fellows, such as that miserable Socrates and Chærephon?

STREPSIADES. Silence! say nothing foolish! If you desire your father not to die of hunger, join their company and let your horses go.

PHIDIPPIDES. No, by Bacchus! even though you gave me the pheasants that Leogoras rears.

STREPSIADES. Oh! my beloved son, I beseech you, go and follow their teachings.

PHIDIPPIDES. And what is it I should learn?

STREPSIADES. 'Twould seem they have two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, and that, thanks to the false, the worst law-suits can be gained. If then you learn this science, which is false, I shall not pay an obolus of all the debts I have contracted on your account.

PHIDIPPIDES. No, I will not do it. I should no longer dare to look at our gallant horsemen, when I had so tarnished my fair hue of honour.

STREPSIADES. Well then, by Demeter! I will no longer support you, neither you, nor your team, nor your saddle-horse. Go and hang yourself, I turn you out of house and home.

PHIDIPPIDES. My uncle Megacles will not leave me without horses; I shall go to him and laugh at your anger.

STREPSIADES. One rebuff shall not dishearten me. With the help of the gods I will enter this school and learn myself. But at my age, memory has gone and the mind is slow to grasp things. How can all these fine distinctions, these



subtleties be learned? Bah! why should I dally thus instead of rapping at the door? Slave, slave! (*He knocks and calls.*)

A DISCIPLE. A plague on you! Who are you?

STREPSIADES. Strepsiades, the son of Phido, of the deme of Cicynna.

DISCIPLE. 'Tis for sure only an ignorant and illiterate fellow who lets drive at the door with such kicks. You have brought on a miscarriage—of an idea!

STREPSIADES. Pardon me, pray; for I live far away from here in the country. But tell me, what was the idea that miscarried?

DISCIPLE. I may not tell it to any but a disciple.

STREPSIADES. Then tell me without fear, for I have come to study among you.

DISCIPLE. Very well then, but reflect, that these are mysteries. Lately, a flea bit Chærephon on the brow and then from there sprang on to the head of Socrates. Socrates asked Chærephon, "How many times the length of its legs does a flea jump?"

STREPSIADES. And how ever did he set about measuring it?

DISCIPLE. Oh! 'twas most ingenious! He melted some wax, seized the flea and dipped its two feet in the wax, which, when cooled, left them shod with true Persian buskins. These he slipped off and with them measured the distance.

STREPSIADES. Ah! great Zeus! what a brain! what subtlety!

DISCIPLE. I wonder what then would you say, if you knew another of Socrates' contrivances?

STREPSIADES. What is it? Pray tell me.

DISCIPLE. Chærephon of the deme of Sphettia asked him whether he thought a gnat buzzed through its proboscis or through its rear.

STREPSIADES. And what did he say about the gnat?

DISCIPLE. He said that the gut of the gnat was narrow, and that, in passing through this tiny passage, the air is driven with force towards the breech; then after this slender channel, it encountered the rump, which was distended like a trumpet, and there it resounded sonorously.

STREPSIADES. So the rear of a gnat is a trumpet. Oh! what a splendid discovery! Thrice happy Socrates! 'Twould not be difficult to succeed in a lawsuit, knowing so much about the gut of a gnat!

DISCIPLE. Not long ago a lizard caused him the loss of a sublime thought.

STREPSIADES. In what way, an it please you?

DISCIPLE. One night, when he was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard crapped upon him from the top of the roof.

STREPSIADES. This lizard, that relieved itself over Socrates, tickles me.

DISCIPLE. Yesternight we had nothing to eat.

STREPSIADES. Well! What did he contrive, to secure you some supper?

DISCIPLE. He spread over the table a light layer of cinders, bending an iron rod the while; then he took up a pair of compasses and at the same moment unhooked a piece of the victim which was hanging in the palæstra.

STREPSIADES. And we still dare to admire Thales! Open, open this home

of knowledge to me quickly! Haste, haste to show me Socrates; I long to become his disciple. But do, do open the door. (*The DISCIPLE admits STREPSIADES.*) Ah! by Heracles! what country are those animals from?

DISCIPLE. Why, what are you astonished at? What do you think they resemble?

STREPSIADES. The captives of Pylos. But why do they look so fixedly on the ground?

DISCIPLE. They are seeking for what is below the ground.

STREPSIADES. Ah! 'tis onions they are seeking. Do not give yourselves so much trouble; I know where there are some, fine and large ones. But what are those fellows doing, who are bent all double?

DISCIPLE. They are sounding the abysses of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES. And what is their rump looking at in the heavens?

DISCIPLE. It is studying astronomy on its own account. But come in; so that the master may not find us here.

STREPSIADES. Not yet, not yet; let them not change their position. I want to tell them my own little matter.

DISCIPLE. But they may not stay too long in the open air and away from school.

STREPSIADES. In the name of all the gods, what is that? Tell me. (*Pointing to a celestial globe.*)

DISCIPLE. That is astronomy.

STREPSIADES. And that? (*Pointing to a map.*)

DISCIPLE. Geometry.

STREPSIADES. What is that used for?

DISCIPLE. To measure the land.

STREPSIADES. But that is apportioned by lot.

DISCIPLE. No, no, I mean the entire earth.

STREPSIADES. Ah! what a funny thing! How generally useful indeed is this invention!

DISCIPLE. There is the whole surface of the earth. Look! Here is Athens.

STREPSIADES. Athens! you are mistaken; I see no courts sitting.

DISCIPLE. Nevertheless it is really and truly the Attic territory.

STREPSIADES. And where are my neighbours of Cicynna?

DISCIPLE. They live here. This is Eubœa; you see this island, that is so long and narrow.

STREPSIADES. I know. 'Tis we and Pericles, who have stretched it by dint of squeezing it. And where is Lacedæmon?

DISCIPLE. Lacedæmon? Why, here it is, look.

STREPSIADES. How near it is to us! Think it well over, it must be removed to a greater distance.

DISCIPLE. But, by Zeus, that is not possible.

STREPSIADES. Then, woe to you! And who is this man suspended up in a basket?

DISCIPLE. 'Tis *he himself*.

STREPSIADES. Who himself?

DISCIPLE. Socrates.

STREPSIADES. Socrates! Oh! I pray you, call him right loudly for me.

DISCIPLE. Call him yourself; I have no time to waste.

STREPSIADES. Socrates! my little Socrates!

SOCRATES. Mortal, what do you want with me?

STREPSIADES. First, what are you doing up there? Tell me, I beseech you.

SOCRATES. I traverse the air and contemplate the sun.

STREPSIADES. Thus 'tis not on the solid ground, but from the height of this basket, that you slight the gods, if indeed . . .

SOCRATES. I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle essence of my mind with this air, which is of the like nature, in order to clearly penetrate the things of heaven. I should have discovered nothing, had I remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth by its force attracts the sap of the mind to itself. 'Tis just the same with the water-cress.

STREPSIADES. What? Does the mind attract the sap of the water-cress? Ah! my dear little Socrates, come down to me! I have come to ask you for lessons.

SOCRATES. And for what lessons?

STREPSIADES. I want to learn how to speak. I have borrowed money, and my merciless creditors do not leave me a moment's peace; all my goods are at stake.

SOCRATES. And how was it you did not see that you were getting so much into debt?

STREPSIADES. My ruin has been the madness for horses, a most rapacious evil; but teach me one of your two methods of reasoning, the one whose object is not to repay anything, and, may the gods bear witness, that I am ready to pay any fee you may name.

SOCRATES. By which gods will you swear? To begin with, the gods are not a coin current with us.

STREPSIADES. But what do you swear by then? By the iron money of Byzantium?

SOCRATES. Do you really wish to know the truth of celestial matters?

STREPSIADES. Why, truly, if 'tis possible.

SOCRATES. . . . and to converse with the clouds, who are our genii?

STREPSIADES. Without a doubt.

SOCRATES. Then be seated on this sacred couch.

STREPSIADES. I am seated.

SOCRATES. Now take this chaplet.

STREPSIADES. Why a chaplet? Alas! Socrates, would you sacrifice me, like Athamas?

SOCRATES. No, these are the rites of initiation.

STREPSIADES. And what is it I am to gain?

SOCRATES. You will become a thorough rattle-pate, a hardened old stager, the fine flour of the talkers. . . . But come, keep quiet.

STREPSIADES. By Zeus! You lie not! Soon I shall be nothing but wheat-flour, if you powder me in this fashion.

SOCRATES. Silence, old man, give heed to the prayers. . . . Oh! most mighty king, the boundless air, that keepest the earth suspended in space, thou bright Æther and ye venerable goddesses, the Clouds, who carry in your loins the thunder and the lightning, arise, ye sovereign powers and manifest yourselves in the celestial spheres to the eyes of the sage.

STREPSIADES. Not yet! Wait a bit, till I fold my mantle double, so as not to get wet. And to think that I did not even bring my travelling cap! What a misfortune!

SOCRATES. Come, oh! Clouds, whom I adore, come and show yourselves to this man, whether you be resting on the sacred summits of Olympus, crowned with hoar-frost, or tarrying in the gardens of Ocean, your father, forming sacred choruses with the Nymphs; whether you be gathering the waves of the Nile in golden vases or dwelling in the Mæotic marsh or on the snowy rocks of Mimas, hearken to my prayer and accept my offering. May these sacrifices be pleasing to you.

CHORUS. Eternal Clouds, let us appear, let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.

SOCRATES. Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call! (*To STREPSIADES.*) Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?

STREPSIADES. Oh! adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off my thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me. Faith! whether permitted or not, I must, I must crap!

SOCRATES. No scoffing; do not copy those accursed comic poets. Come, silence! a numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.

CHORUS. Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Cecrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate. . . . What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, are to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and the serious melodies of the flute.

STREPSIADES. By Zeus! Tell me, Socrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?

SOCRATES. Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.

STREPSIADES. Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to



voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.

SOCRATES. Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.

STREPSIADES. But where, where? Show them to me.

SOCRATES. They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.

STREPSIADES. 'Tis strange! I can see nothing.

SOCRATES. There, close to the entrance.

STREPSIADES. Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.

SOCRATES. You *must* see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with gum as thick as pumpkins.

STREPSIADES. Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.

SOCRATES. And you did not know, you never suspected, that they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES. No, indeed; methought the Clouds were only fog, dew and vapour.

SOCRATES. But what you certainly do not know is that they are the support of a crowd of quacks, both the diviners, who were sent to Thurium, the notorious physicians, the well-combed fops, who load their fingers with rings down to the nails, and the braggarts, who write dithyrambic verses, all these are idlers whom the Clouds provide a living for, because they sing them in their verses.

STREPSIADES. 'Tis then for this that they praise "the rapid flight of the moist clouds, which veil the brightness of day" and "the waving locks of the hundred-headed Typho" and "the impetuous tempests, which float through the heavens, like birds of prey with aerial wings, loaded with mists" and "the rains, the dew, which the clouds outpour." As a reward for these fine phrases they bolt well-grown, tasty mullet and delicate thrushes.

SOCRATES. Yes, thanks to these. And is it not right and meet?

STREPSIADES. Tell me then why, if these really are the Clouds, they so very much resemble mortals. This is not their usual form.

SOCRATES. What are they like then?

STREPSIADES. I don't know exactly; well, they are like great packs of wool, but not like women—no, not in the least. . . . And these have noses.

SOCRATES. Answer my questions.

STREPSIADES. Willingly! Go on, I am listening.

SOCRATES. Have you not sometimes seen clouds in the sky like a centaur, a leopard, a wolf or a bull?

STREPSIADES. Why, certainly I have, but what then?

SOCRATES. They take what metamorphosis they like. If they see a debauchee with long flowing locks and hairy as a beast, like the son of Xenophantes, they take the form of a Centaur in derision of his shameful passion.

STREPSIADES. And when they see Simon, that thief of public money, what do they do then?

SOCRATES. To picture him to the life, they turn at once into wolves.

STREPSIADES. So that was why yesterday, when they saw Cleonymus, who cast away his buckler because he is the veriest poltroon amongst men, they changed into deer.

SOCRATES. And to-day they have seen Clisthenes; you see . . . they are women.

STREPSIADES. Hail, sovereign goddesses, and if ever you have let your celestial voice be heard by mortal ears, speak to me, oh! speak to me, ye all-powerful queens.

CHORUS. Hail! veteran of the ancient times, you who burn to instruct yourself in fine language. And you, great high-priest of subtle nonsense, tell us your desire. To you and Prodicus alone of all the hollow orationers of to-day have we lent an ear—to Prodicus, because of his knowledge and his great wisdom, and to you, because you walk with head erect, a confident look, barefooted, resigned to everything and proud of our protection.

STREPSIADES. Oh! Earth! What august utterances! how sacred! how wondrous!

SOCRATES. That is because these are the only goddesses: all the rest are pure myth.

STREPSIADES. But by the Earth! is our Father, Zeus, the Olympian, not a god?

SOCRATES. Zeus! what Zeus? Are you mad? There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES. What are you saying now? Who causes the rain to fall? Answer me that!

SOCRATES. Why, 'tis these, and I will prove it. Have you ever seen it raining without clouds? Let Zeus then cause rain with a clear sky and without their presence!

STREPSIADES. By Apollo! that is powerfully argued! For my own part, I always thought it was Zeus pissing into a sieve. But tell me, who is it makes the thunder, which I so much dread?

SOCRATES. 'Tis these, when they roll one over the other.

STREPSIADES. But how can that be? you most daring among men!

SOCRATES. Being full of water, and forced to move along, they are of necessity precipitated in rain, being fully distended with moisture from the regions where they have been floating; hence they bump each other heavily and burst with great noise.

STREPSIADES. But is it not Zeus who forces them to move?

SOCRATES. Not at all; 'tis aerial Whirlwind.

STREPSIADES. The Whirlwind! ah! I did not know that. So Zeus, it seems, has no existence, and 'tis the Whirlwind that reigns in his stead? But you have not yet told me what makes the roll of the thunder?

SOCRATES. Have you not understood me then? I tell you, that the Clouds, when full of rain, bump against one another, and that, being inordinately swollen out, they burst with a great noise.

STREPSIADES. How can you make me credit that?

SOCRATES. Take yourself as an example. When you have heartily gorged



on stew at the Panathenæa, you get throes of stomach-ache and then suddenly your belly resounds with prolonged growling.

STREPSIADES. Yes, yes, by Apollo! I suffer, I get colic, then the stew sets a-growling like thunder and finally bursts forth with a terrific noise. At first, 'tis but a little gurgling *pappax, pappax!* then it increases, *papapappax!* and when I seek relief, why, 'tis thunder indeed, *papapappax! pappax!! papapappax!!* just like the clouds.

SOCRATES. Well then, reflect what a noise is produced by your belly, which is but small. Shall not the air, which is boundless, produce these mighty claps of thunder?

STREPSIADES. But tell me this. Whence comes the lightning, the dazzling flame, which at times consumes the man it strikes, at others hardly singes him. Is it not plain, that 'tis Zeus hurling it at the perjurers?

SOCRATES. Out upon the fool! the driveller! he still savours of the golden age! If Zeus strikes at the perjurers, why has he not blasted Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus? Of a surety, greater perjurers cannot exist. No, he strikes his own Temple, and Sunium, the promontory of Athens, and the towering oaks. Now, why should he do that? An oak is no perjurer.

STREPSIADES. I cannot tell, but it seems to me well argued. What is the thunder then?

SOCRATES. When a dry wind ascends to the Clouds and gets shut into them, it blows them out like a bladder; finally, being too confined, it bursts them, escapes with fierce violence and a roar to flash into flame by reason of its own impetuosity.

STREPSIADES. Forsooth, 'tis just what happened to me one day. 'Twas at the feast of Zeus! I was cooking a sow's belly for my family and I had forgotten to slit it open. It swelled out and, suddenly bursting, discharged itself right into my eyes and burnt my face.

CHORUS. Oh, mortal! you, who desire to instruct yourself in our great wisdom, the Athenians, the Greeks will envy you your good fortune. Only you must have the memory and ardour for study, you must know how to stand the tests, hold your own, go forward without feeling fatigue, caring but little for food, abstaining from wine, gymnastic exercises and other similar follies, in fact, you must believe as every man of intellect should, that the greatest of all blessings is to live and think more clearly than the vulgar herd, to shine in the contests of words.

STREPSIADES. If it be a question of hardness for labour, of spending whole nights at work, of living sparingly, of fighting my stomach and only eating chick-pease, rest assured, I am as hard as an anvil.

SOCRATES. Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods but Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue, these three alone.

STREPSIADES. I would not speak to the others, even if I should meet them in the street; not a single sacrifice, not a libation, not a grain of incense for them!

CHORUS. Tell us boldly then what you want of us; you cannot fail to suc-

ceed, if you honour and revere us and if you are resolved to become a clever man.

STREPSIADES. Oh, sovereign goddesses, 'tis but a very small favour that I ask of you; grant that I may distance all the Greeks by a hundred stadia in the art of speaking.

CHORUS. We grant you this, and henceforward no eloquence shall more often succeed with the people than your own.

STREPSIADES. May the god shield me from possessing great eloquence! 'Tis not what I want. I want to be able to turn bad law-suits to my own advantage and to slip through the fingers of my creditors.

CHORUS. It shall be as you wish, for your ambitions are modest. Commit yourself fearlessly to our ministers, the sophists.

STREPSIADES. This will I do, for I trust in you. Moreover there is no drawing back, what with these cursed horses and this marriage, which has eaten up my vitals. So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of the laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to slip through any hole; supple as a leathern strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain; a knave with a hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. With such epithets do I seek to be greeted; on these terms they can treat me as they choose, and, if they wish, by Demeter! they can turn me into sausages and serve me up to the philosophers.

CHORUS. Here have we a bold and well-disposed pupil indeed. When we shall have taught you, your glory among the mortals will reach even to the skies.

STREPSIADES. Wherein will that profit me?

CHORUS. You will pass your whole life among us and will be the most envied of men.

STREPSIADES. Shall I really ever see such happiness?

CHORUS. Clients will be everlastingly besieging your door in crowds, burning to get at you, to explain their business to you and to consult you about their suits, which, in return for your ability, will bring you in great sums. But, Socrates, begin the lessons you want to teach this old man; rouse his mind, try the strength of his intelligence.

SOCRATES. Come, tell me the kind of mind you have; 'tis important I know this, that I may order my batteries against you in a new fashion.

STREPSIADES. Eh, what! in the name of the gods, are you purposing to assault me then?

SOCRATES. No. I only wish to ask you some questions. Have you any memory?

STREPSIADES. That depends: if anything is owed me, my memory is excellent, but if I owe, alas! I have none whatever.

SOCRATES. Have you a natural gift for speaking?

STREPSIADES. For speaking, no; for cheating, yes.

SOCRATES. How will you be able to learn then?

STREPSIADES. Very easily, have no fear.

SOCRATES. Thus, when I throw forth some philosophical thought anent things celestial, you will seize it in its very flight?

STREPSIADES. Then I am to snap up wisdom much as a dog snaps up a morsel?

SOCRATES. Oh! the ignoramus! the barbarian! I greatly fear, old man, 'twill be needful for me to have recourse to blows. Now, let me hear what you do when you are beaten.

STREPSIADES. I receive the blow, then wait a moment, take my witnesses and finally summon my assailant at law.

SOCRATES. Come, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES. Have I robbed you of anything?

SOCRATES. No, but 'tis usual to enter the school without your cloak.

STREPSIADES. But I am not come here to look for stolen goods.

SOCRATES. Off with it, fool!

STREPSIADES. Tell me, if I prove thoroughly attentive and learn with zeal, which of your disciples shall I resemble, do you think?

SOCRATES. You will be the image of Chærephon.

STREPSIADES. Ah! unhappy me! I shall then be but half alive?

SOCRATES. A truce to this chatter! follow me and no more of it.

STREPSIADES. First give me a honey-cake, for to descend down there sets me all a-tremble; meseems 'tis the cave of Trophonius.

SOCRATES. But get in with you! What reason have you for thus dallying at the door?

CHORUS. Good luck! you have courage; may you succeed, you, who, though already so advanced in years, wish to instruct your mind with new studies and practise it in wisdom!

CHORUS (*Parabasis*). Spectators! By Bacchus, whose servant I am, I will frankly tell you the truth. May I secure both victory and renown as certainly as I hold you for adept critics and as I regard this comedy as my best. I wished to give you the first view of a work, which had cost me much trouble, but I withdrew, unjustly beaten by unskilful rivals. 'Tis you, oh, enlightened public, for whom I have prepared my piece, that I reproach with this. Nevertheless I shall never willingly cease to seek the approval of the discerning. I have not forgotten the day, when men, whom one is happy to have for an audience, received my "Young Man" and my "Debauchee" with so much favour in this very place. Then as yet virgin, my Muse had not attained the legal age for maternity; she had to expose her first-born for another to adopt, and it has since grown up under your generous patronage. Ever since you have as good as sworn me your faithful alliance. Thus, like Electra of the poets, my comedy has come to seek you to-day, hoping again to encounter such enlightened spectators. As far away as she can discern her Orestes, she will be able to recognize him by his curly head. And note her modest demeanour! She has not sewn on a piece of hanging leather, thick and reddened at the end, to

cause laughter among the children; she does not rail at the bald, neither does she dance the cordax; no old man is seen, who, while uttering his lines, batters his questioner with a stick to make his poor jests pass muster. She does not rush upon the scene carrying a torch and screaming, "La, la! la, la!" No, she relies upon herself and her verses. . . . My value is so well known, that I take no further pride in it. I do not seek to deceive you, by reproducing the same subjects two or three times; I always invent fresh themes to present before you, themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever. I attacked Cleon to his face and when he was all-powerful; but he has fallen, and now I have no desire to kick him when he is down. My rivals, on the contrary, once that this wretched Hyperbolus has given them the cue, have never ceased setting upon both him and his mother. First Eupolis presented his "Maricas"; this was simply my "Knights," whom this plagiarist had clumsily furbished up again by adding to the piece an old drunken woman, so that she might dance the cordax. 'Twas an old idea, taken from Phrynichus, who caused his old hag to be devoured by a monster of the deep. Then Hermippus fell foul of Hyperbolus and now all the others fall upon him and repeat my comparison of the eels. May those who find amusement in their pieces not be pleased with mine, but as for you, who love and applaud my inventions, why, posterity will praise your good taste.

Oh, ruler of Olympus, all-powerful king of the gods, great Zeus, it is thou whom I first invoke; protect this chorus; and thou too, Posidon, whose dread trident upheaves at the will of thy anger both the bowels of the earth and the salty waves of the ocean. I invoke my illustrious father, the divine Æther, the universal sustainer of life, and Phœbus, who, from the summit of his chariot, sets the world aflame with his dazzling rays, Phœbus, a mighty deity amongst the gods and adored amongst mortals.

Most wise spectators, lend us all your attention. Give heed to our just reproaches. There exist no gods to whom this city owes more than it does to us, whom alone you forget. Not a sacrifice, not a libation is there for those who protect you! Have you decreed some mad expedition? Well! we thunder or we fall down in rain. When you chose that enemy of heaven, the Paphlagonian tanner, for a general, we knitted our brow, we caused our wrath to break out; the lightning shot forth, the thunder pealed, the moon deserted her course and the sun at once veiled his beam threatening no longer to give you light, if Cleon became general. Nevertheless you elected him; 'tis said, Athens never resolves upon some fatal step but the gods turn these errors into her greatest gain. Do you wish that this election should even now be a success for you? 'Tis a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Cleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight around his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity.

Aid me also, Phœbus, god of Delos, who reignest on the cragged peaks of Cynthia; and thou, happy virgin, to whom the Lydian damsels offer pompous sacrifice in a temple of gold; and thou, goddess of our country, Athené, armed with the ægis, the protectress of Athens; and thou, who, surrounded by the



Bacchanals of Delphi, roamest over the rocks of Parnassus shaking the flame of thy resinous torch, thou, Bacchus, the god of revel and joy.

As we were preparing to come here, we were hailed by the Moon and were charged to wish joy and happiness both to the Athenians and to their allies; further, she said that she was enraged and that you treated her very shamefully, her, who does not pay you in words alone, but who renders you all real benefits. Firstly, thanks to her, you save at least a drachma each month for lights, for each, as he is leaving home at night, says, "Slave, buy no torches, for the moonlight is beautiful,"—not to name a thousand other benefits. Nevertheless you do not reckon the days correctly and your calendar is naught but confusion. Consequently the gods load her with threats each time they get home and are disappointed of their meal, because the festival has not been kept in the regular order of time. When you should be sacrificing, you are putting to the torture or administering justice. And often, we others, the gods, are fasting in token of mourning for the death of Memnon or Sarpedon, while you are devoting yourselves to joyous libations. 'Tis for this, that last year, when the lot would have invested Hyperbolus with the duty of Amphictyon, we took his crown from him, to teach him that time must be divided according to the phases of the moon.

SOCRATES. By Respiration, the Breath of Life! By Chaos! By the Air! I have never seen a man so gross, so inept, so stupid, so forgetful. All the little quibbles, which I teach him, he forgets even before he has learnt them. Yet I will not give it up, I will make him come out here into the open air. Where are you, Strepsiades? Come, bring your couch out here.

STREPSIADES. But the bugs will not allow me to bring it.

SOCRATES. Have done with such nonsense! place it there and pay attention.

STREPSIADES. Well, here I am.

SOCRATES. Good! Which science of all those you have never been taught, do you wish to learn first? The measures, the rhythms or the verses?

STREPSIADES. Why, the measures; the flour dealer cheated me out of two *chænixes* the other day.

SOCRATES. 'Tis not about that I ask you, but which, according to you, is the best measure, the trimeter or the tetrameter?

STREPSIADES. The one I prefer is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES. You talk nonsense, my good fellow.

STREPSIADES. I will wager your tetrameter is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES. Plague seize the dunce and the fool! Come, perchance you will learn the rhythms quicker.

STREPSIADES. Will the rhythms supply me with food?

SOCRATES. First they will help you to be pleasant in company, then to know what is meant by cœnopliar rhythm and what by the dactylic.

STREPSIADES. Of the dactyl? I know that quite well.

SOCRATES. What is it then?

STREPSIADES. Why, 'tis this finger; formerly, when a child, I used this one.

SOCRATES. You are as low-minded as you are stupid.

STREPSIADES. But, wretched man, I do not want to learn all this.

SOCRATES. Then what *do* you want to know?

STREPSIADES. Not that, not that, but the art of false reasoning.

SOCRATES. But you must first learn other things. Come, what are the male quadrupeds?

STREPSIADES. Oh! I know the males thoroughly. Do not take me for a fool then? The ram, the buck, the bull, the dog, the pigeon.

SOCRATES. Do you see what you are doing; is not the female pigeon called the same as the male?

STREPSIADES. How else? Come now?

SOCRATES. How else? With you then 'tis pigeon and pigeon!

STREPSIADES. 'Tis true, by Posidon! but what names do you want me to give them?

SOCRATES. Term the female pigeonnnette and the male pigeon.

STREPSIADES. Pigeonnnette! hah! by the Air! That's splendid! for that lesson bring out your kneading-trough and I will fill him with flour to the brim.

SOCRATES. There you are wrong again; you make *trough* masculine and it should be feminine.

STREPSIADES. What? if I say *him*, do I make the *trough* masculine?

SOCRATES. Assuredly! would you not say him for Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES. Well?

SOCRATES. Then *trough* is of the same gender as Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES. Oh! good sir! Cleonymus never had a kneading-trough; he used a round mortar for the purpose. But come, tell me what I *should* say?

SOCRATES. For *trough* you should say *her* as you would for Sostraté.

STREPSIADES. *Her*?

SOCRATES. In this manner you make it truly female.

STREPSIADES. That's it! *Her* for *trough* and *her* for Cleonymus.

SOCRATES. Now I must teach you to distinguish the masculine proper names from those that are feminine.

STREPSIADES. Ah! I know the female names well.

SOCRATES. Name some then.

STREPSIADES. Lysilla, Philinna, Clitagora, Demetria.

SOCRATES. And what are masculine names?

STREPSIADES. They are countless—Philoxenus, Melesias, Amynias.

SOCRATES. But, wretched man, the last two are not masculine.

STREPSIADES. You do not reckon them masculine?

SOCRATES. Not at all. If you met Amynias, how would you hail him?

STREPSIADES. How? Why, I should shout, "Hi, hither, Amynia!"

SOCRATES. Do you see? 'tis a female name that you give him.

STREPSIADES. And is it not rightly done, since he refuses military service? But what use is there in learning what we all know?

SOCRATES. You know nothing about it. Come, lie down there.

STREPSIADES. What for?

SOCRATES. Ponder awhile over matters that interest you.

STREPSIADES. Oh! I pray you, not there! but, if I must lie down and ponder, let me lie on the ground.



SOCRATES. 'Tis out of the question. Come! on to the couch!

STREPSIADES. What cruel fate! What a torture the bugs will this day put me to!

SOCRATES. Ponder and examine closely, gather your thoughts together, let your mind turn to every side of things; if you meet with a difficulty, spring quickly to some other idea; above all, keep your eyes away from all gentle sleep.

STREPSIADES. Oh, woe, woe! oh, woe, woe!

SOCRATES. What ails you? why do you cry so?

STREPSIADES. Oh! I am a dead man! Here are these cursed Corinthians advancing upon me from all corners of the couch; they are biting me, they are gnawing at my sides, they are drinking all my blood, they are twitching off my testicles, they are exploring all up my back, they are killing me!

SOCRATES. Not so much wailing and clamour, if you please.

STREPSIADES. How can I obey? I have lost my money and my complexion, my blood and my slippers, and to cap my misery, I must keep awake on this couch, when scarce a breath of life is left in me.

SOCRATES. Well now! what are you doing? are you reflecting?

STREPSIADES. Yes, by Posidon!

SOCRATES. What about?

STREPSIADES. Whether the bugs will not entirely devour me.

SOCRATES. May death seize you, accursed man!

STREPSIADES. Ah! it has already.

SOCRATES. Come, no giving way! Cover up your head; the thing to do is to find an ingenious alternative.

STREPSIADES. An alternative! ah! I only wish one would come to me from within these coverlets!

SOCRATES. Hold! let us see what our fellow is doing! Ho! are you asleep?

STREPSIADES. No, by Apollo!

SOCRATES. Have you got hold of anything?

STREPSIADES. No, nothing whatever.

SOCRATES. Nothing at all!

STREPSIADES. No, nothing except this, which I've got in my hand.

SOCRATES. Are you not going to cover your head immediately and ponder?

STREPSIADES. Over what? Come, Socrates, tell me.

SOCRATES. Think first what you want, and then tell me.

STREPSIADES. But I have told you a thousand times what I want. 'Tis not to pay any of my creditors.

SOCRATES. Come, wrap yourself up; concentrate your mind, which wanders too lightly, study every detail, scheme and examine thoroughly.

STREPSIADES. Oh, woe! woe! oh dear! oh dear!

SOCRATES. Keep yourself quiet, and if any notion troubles you, put it quickly aside, then resume it and think over it again.

STREPSIADES. My dear little Socrates!

SOCRATES. What is it, old greybeard?

STREPSIADES. I have a scheme for not paying my debts.

SOCRATES. Let us hear it.

STREPSIADES. Tell me, if I purchased a Thessalian witch, I could make the moon descend during the night and shut it, like a mirror, into a round box and there keep it carefully. . . .

SOCRATES. How would you gain by that?

STREPSIADES. How? why, if the moon did not rise, I would have no interest to pay.

SOCRATES. Why so?

STREPSIADES. Because money is lent by the month.

SOCRATES. Good! but I am going to propose another trick to you. If you were condemned to pay five talents, how would you manage to quash that verdict? Tell me.

STREPSIADES. How? how? I don't know, I must think.

SOCRATES. Do you always shut your thoughts within yourself? Let your ideas fly in the air, like a may-bug, tied by the foot with a thread.

STREPSIADES. I have found a very clever way to annul that conviction; you will admit that much yourself.

SOCRATES. What is it?

STREPSIADES. Have you ever seen a beautiful, transparent stone at the druggist's, with which you may kindle fire?

SOCRATES. You mean a crystal lens.

STREPSIADES. Yes.

SOCRATES. Well, what then?

STREPSIADES. If I placed myself with this stone in the sun and a long way off from the clerk, while he was writing out the conviction, I could make all the wax, upon which the words were written, melt.

SOCRATES. Well thought out, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES. Ah, I am delighted to have annulled the decree that was to cost me five talents.

SOCRATES. Come, take up this next question quickly.

STREPSIADES. Which?

SOCRATES. If, when summoned to court, you were in danger of losing your case for want of witnesses, how would you make the conviction fall upon your opponent?

STREPSIADES. 'Tis very simple and most easy.

SOCRATES. Let me hear.

STREPSIADES. This way. If another case had to be pleaded before mine was called, I should run and hang myself.

SOCRATES. You talk rubbish!

STREPSIADES. Not so, by the gods! if I was dead, no action could lie against me.

SOCRATES. You are merely beating the air. Begone! I will give you no more lessons.

STREPSIADES. Why not? Oh! Socrates! in the name of the gods!

SOCRATES. But you forget as fast as you learn. Come, what was the thing I taught you first? Tell me.

STREPSIADES. Ah! let me see. What was the first thing? What was it then? Ah! that thing in which we knead the bread, oh! my god! what do you call it?

SOCRATES. Plague take the most forgetful and silliest of old addlepaters!

STREPSIADES. Alas! what a calamity! what will become of me? I am undone if I do not learn how to ply my tongue. Oh! Clouds! give me good advice.

CHORUS. Old man, we counsel you, if you have brought up a son, to send him to learn in your stead.

STREPSIADES. Undoubtedly I have a son, as well endowed as the best, but he is unwilling to learn. What will become of me?

CHORUS. And you don't make him obey you?

STREPSIADES. You see, he is big and strong; moreover, through his mother he is a descendant of those fine birds, the race of Cœsyra. Nevertheless, I will go and find him, and if he refuses, I will turn him out of the house. Go in, Socrates, and wait for me awhile.

CHORUS (*to* SOCRATES). Do you understand, that, thanks to us, you will be loaded with benefits? Here is a man, ready to obey you in all things. You see how he is carried away with admiration and enthusiasm. Profit by it to clip him as short as possible; fine chances are all too quickly gone.

STREPSIADES. No, by the Clouds! you stay no longer here; go and devour the ruins of your uncle Megacles' fortune.

PHIDIPPIDES. Oh! my poor father! what has happened to you? By the Olympian Zeus! you are no longer in your senses!

STREPSIADES. See! see! "the Olympian Zeus." Oh! the fool! to believe in Zeus at your age!

PHIDIPPIDES. What is there in that to make you laugh?

STREPSIADES. You are then a tiny little child, if you credit such antiquated rubbish! But come here, that I may teach you; I will tell you something very necessary to know to be a man; but you will not repeat it to anybody.

PHIDIPPIDES. Come, what is it?

STREPSIADES. Just now you swore by Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES. Aye, that I did.

STREPSIADES. Do you see how good it is to learn? Phidippides, there is no Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES. What is there then?

STREPSIADES. 'Tis the Whirlwind, that has driven out Jupiter and is King now.

PHIDIPPIDES. Go to! what drivell!

STREPSIADES. Know it to be the truth.

PHIDIPPIDES. And who says so?

STREPSIADES. 'Tis Socrates, the Melian, and Chærephon, who knows how to measure the jump of a flea.

PHIDIPPIDES. Have you reached such a pitch of madness that you believe those bilious fellows?

STREPSIADES. Use better language, and do not insult men who are clever and full of wisdom. who. to economize, are never shaved, shun the gymnasia and

never go to the baths, while you, you only await my death to eat up my wealth. But come, come as quickly as you can to learn in my stead.

PHIDIPPIDES. And what good can be learnt of them?

STREPSIADES. What good indeed? Why, all human knowledge. Firstly, you will know yourself grossly ignorant. But await me here awhile.

PHIDIPPIDES. Alas! what is to be done? My father has lost his wits. Must I have him certificated for lunacy, or must I order his coffin?

STREPSIADES. Come! what kind of bird is this? tell me.

PHIDIPPIDES. A pigeon.

STREPSIADES. Good! And this female?

PHIDIPPIDES. A pigeon.

STREPSIADES. The same for both? You make me laugh! For the future you will call this one a pigeonnette and the other a pigeon.

PHIDIPPIDES. A pigeonnette! These then are the fine things you have just learnt at the school of these sons of the Earth!

STREPSIADES. And many others; but what I learnt I forgot at once, because I am too old.

PHIDIPPIDES. So this is why you have lost your cloak?

STREPSIADES. I have not lost it, I have consecrated it to Philosophy.

PHIDIPPIDES. And what have you done with your sandals, you poor fool?

STREPSIADES. If I have lost them, it is for what was necessary, just as Pericles did. But come, move yourself, let us go in; if necessary, do wrong to obey your father. When you were six years old and still lisped, 'twas I who obeyed you. I remember at the feasts of Zeus you had a consuming wish for a little chariot and I bought it for you with the first obolus which I received as a juryman in the Courts.

PHIDIPPIDES. You will soon repent of what you ask me to do.

STREPSIADES. Oh! now I am happy! He obeys. Here, Socrates, here! Come out quick! Here I am bringing you my son; he refused, but I have persuaded him.

SOCRATES. Why, he is but a child yet. He is not used to these baskets, in which we suspend our minds.

PHIDIPPIDES. To make you better used to them, I would you were hung.

STREPSIADES. A curse upon you! you insult your master!

SOCRATES. "I would you were hung!" What a stupid speech! and so emphatically spoken! How can one ever get out of an accusation with such a tone, summon witnesses or touch or convince? And yet when we think, Hyperbolus learnt all this for one talent!

STREPSIADES. Rest undisturbed and teach him. 'Tis a most intelligent nature. Even when quite little he amused himself at home with making houses, carving boats, constructing little chariots of leather, and understood wonderfully how to make frogs out of pomegranate rinds. Teach him both methods of reasoning, the strong and also the weak, which by false arguments triumphs over the strong; if not the two, at least the false, and that in every possible way.



SOCRATES. 'Tis Just and Unjust Discourse themselves that shall instruct him.

STREPESIADDES. I go, but forget it not, he must always, always be able to confound the true.

JUST DISCOURSE. Come here! Shameless as you may be, will you dare to show your face to the spectators?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Take me where you list. I seek a throng, so that I may the better annihilate you.

JUST DISCOURSE. Annihilate me! Do you forget who you are?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. I am Reasoning.

JUST DISCOURSE. Yes, the weaker Reasoning.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. But I triumph over you, who claim to be the stronger.

JUST DISCOURSE. By what cunning shifts, pray?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. By the invention of new maxims.

JUST DISCOURSE. . . . which are received with favour by these fools.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Say rather, by these wiseacres.

JUST DISCOURSE. I am going to destroy you mercilessly.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. How pray? Let us see you do it.

JUST DISCOURSE. By saying what is true.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. I shall retort and shall very soon have the better of you. First, I maintain that justice has no existence.

JUST DISCOURSE. Has no existence?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. No existence! Why, where is it?

JUST DISCOURSE. With the gods.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. How then, if justice exists, was Zeus not put to death for having put his father in chains?

JUST DISCOURSE. Bah! this is enough to turn my stomach! A basin, quick!

UNJUST DISCOURSE. You are an old driveller and stupid withal.

JUST DISCOURSE. And you a debauchee and a shameless fellow.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Hah! What sweet expressions!

JUST DISCOURSE. An impious buffoon.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. You crown me with roses and with lilies.

JUST DISCOURSE. A parricide.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Why, you shower gold upon me.

JUST DISCOURSE. Formerly, 'twas a hailstorm of blows.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. I deck myself with your abuse.

JUST DISCOURSE. What impudence!

UNJUST DISCOURSE. What tomfoolery!

JUST DISCOURSE. 'Tis because of you that the youth no longer attends the schools. The Athenians will soon recognize what lessons you teach those who are fools enough to believe you.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. You are overwhelmed with wretchedness.

JUST DISCOURSE. And you, you prosper. Yet you were poor when you said, "I am the Mysian Telephus," and used to stuff your wallet with maxims of Pandeletus to nibble at.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Oh! the beautiful wisdom, of which you are now boasting!



JUST DISCOURSE. Madman! But yet madder the city that keeps you, you, the corrupter of its youth!

UNJUST DISCOURSE. 'Tis not you who will teach this young man; you are as old and out of date as Saturn.

JUST DISCOURSE. Nay, it will certainly be I, if he does not wish to be lost and to practise verbosity only.

UNJUST DISCOURSE (*to PHIDIPPIDES*). Come hither and leave him to beat the air.

JUST DISCOURSE (*to UNJUST DISCOURSE*). Evil be unto you, if you touch him.

CHORUS. A truce to your quarrellings and abuse! But expound, you, what you taught us formerly, and you, your new doctrine. Thus, after hearing each of you argue, he will be able to choose betwixt the two schools.

JUST DISCOURSE. I am quite agreeable.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. And I too.

CHORUS. Who is to speak first?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Let it be my opponent, he has my full consent; then I will follow upon the very ground he shall have chosen and shall shatter him with a hail of new ideas and subtle fancies; if after that he dares to breathe another word, I shall sting him in the face and in the eyes with our maxims, which are as keen as the sting of a wasp, and he will die.

CHORUS. Here are two rivals confident in their powers of oratory and in the thoughts over which they have pondered so long. Let us see which will come triumphant out of the contest. This wisdom, for which my friends maintain such a persistent fight, is in great danger. Come then, you, who crowned men of other days with so many virtues, plead the cause dear to you, make yourself known to us.

JUST DISCOURSE. Very well, I will tell you what was the old education, when I used to teach justice with so much success and when modesty was held in veneration. Firstly, it was required of a child, that it should not utter a word. In the street, when they went to the music-school, all the youths of the same district marched lightly clad and ranged in good order, even when the snow was falling in great flakes. At the master's house they had to stand, their legs apart, and they were taught to sing either, "Pallas, the Terrible, who overturneth cities," or "A noise resounded from afar" in the solemn tones of the ancient harmony. If anyone indulged in buffoonery or lent his voice any of the soft inflexions, like those which to-day the disciples of Phrynus take so much pains to form, he was treated as an enemy of the Muses and belaboured with blows. In the wrestling school they would sit with outstretched legs and without display of any indecency to the curious. When they rose, they would smooth over the sand, so as to leave no trace to excite obscene thoughts. Never was a child rubbed with oil below the belt; the rest of their bodies thus retained its fresh bloom and down, like a velvety peach. They were not to be seen approaching a lover and themselves rousing his passion by soft modulation of the voice and lustful gaze. At table, they would not have dared, before

those older than themselves, to have taken a radish, an aniseed or a leaf of parsley, and much less eat fish or thrushes or cross their legs.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. What antiquated rubbish! Have we got back to the days of the festivals of Zeus Polieus, to the Buphonia, to the time of the poet Cecydes and the golden cicadas?

JUST DISCOURSE. 'Tis nevertheless by suchlike teaching I built up the men of Marathon. But you, you teach the children of to-day to bundle themselves quickly into their clothes, and I am enraged when I see them at the Panathenæa forgetting Athené while they dance, and covering themselves with their bucklers. Hence, young man, dare to range yourself beside me, who follow justice and truth; you will then be able to shun the public place, to refrain from the baths, to blush at all that is shameful, to fire up if your virtue is mocked at, to give place to your elders, to honour your parents, in short, to avoid all that is evil. Be modesty itself, and do not run to applaud the dancing girls; if you delight in such scenes, some courtesan will cast you her apple and your reputation will be done for. Do not bandy words with your father, nor treat him as a dotard, nor reproach the old man, who has cherished you, with his age.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. If you listen to him, by Bacchus! you will be the image of the sons of Hippocrates and will be called *mother's great ninny*.

JUST DISCOURSE. No, but you will pass your days at the gymnasium, glowing with strength and health; you will not go to the public place to cackle and wrangle as is done nowadays; you will not live in fear that you may be dragged before the courts for some trifle exaggerated by quibbling. But you will go down to the Academy to run beneath the sacred olives with some virtuous friend of your own age, your head encircled with the white reed, enjoying your ease and breathing the perfume of the yew and of the fresh sprouts of the poplar, rejoicing in the return of springtide and gladly listening to the gentle rustle of the plane tree and the elm. If you devote yourself to practising my precepts, your chest will be stout, your colour glowing, your shoulders broad, your tongue short, your hips muscular, but your other parts small. But if you follow the fashions of the day, you will be pallid in hue, have narrow shoulders, a narrow chest, a long tongue, small hips and a big thing; you will know how to spin forth long-winded arguments on law. You will be persuaded also to regard as splendid everything that is shameful and as shameful everything that is honourable; in a word, you will wallow in debauchery like Antimachus.

CHORUS. How beautiful, high-souled, brilliant is this wisdom that you practise! What a sweet odour of honesty is emitted by your discourse! Happy were those men of other days who lived when you were honoured! And you, seductive talker, come, find some fresh arguments, for your rival has done wonders. Bring out against him all the battery of your wit, if you desire to beat him and not to be laughed out of court.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. At last! I was choking with impatience, I was burning to upset all his arguments! If I am called the Weaker Reasoning in the schools, 'tis precisely because I was the first before all others to discover the

means to confute the laws and the decrees of justice. To invoke solely the weaker arguments and yet triumph is a talent worth more than a hundred thousand drachmæ. But see how I shall batter down the sort of education of which he is so proud. Firstly, he forbids you to bathe in hot water. What grounds have you for condemning hot baths?

JUST DISCOURSE. Because they are baneful and enervate men.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Enough said! Oh! you poor wrestler! From the very outset I have seized you and hold you round the middle; you cannot escape me. Tell me, of all the sons of Zeus, who had the stoutest heart, who performed the most doughty deeds?

JUST DISCOURSE. None, in my opinion, surpassed Heracles.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Where have you ever seen cold baths called "Bath of Heracles"? And yet who was braver than he?

JUST DISCOURSE. 'Tis because of such quibbles, that the baths are seen crowded with young folk, who chatter there the livelong day while the gymnasia remain empty.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Next you condemn the habit of frequenting the market-place, while I approve this. If it were wrong Homer would never have made Nestor speak in public as well as all his wise heroes. As for the art of speaking, he tells you, young men should not practise it; I hold the contrary. Furthermore he preaches chastity to them. Both precepts are equally harmful. Have you ever seen chastity of any use to anyone? Answer and try to confute me.

JUST DISCOURSE. To many; for instance, Peleus won a sword thereby.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. A sword! Ah! what a fine present to make him! Poor wretch! Hyperbolus, the lamb-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than . . . I do not know how many talents, but certainly no sword.

JUST DISCOURSE. Peleus owed it to his chastity that he became the husband of Thetis.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. . . . who left him in the lurch, for he was not the most ardent; in those nocturnal sports between two sheets, which so please women, he possessed but little merit. Get you gone, you are but an old fool. But you, young man, just consider a little what this temperance means and the delights of which it deprives you—young fellows, women, play, dainty dishes, wine, boisterous laughter. And what is life worth without these? Then, if you happen to commit one of these faults inherent in human weakness, some seduction or adultery, and you are caught in the act, you are lost, if you cannot speak. But follow my teaching and you will be able to satisfy your passions, to dance, to laugh, to blush at nothing. Are you surprised in adultery? Then up and tell the husband you are not guilty, and recall to him the example of Zeus, who allowed himself to be conquered by love and by women. Being but a mortal, can you be stronger than a god?

JUST DISCOURSE. And if your pupil gets impaled, his hairs plucked out, and he is seared with a hot ember, how are you going to prove to him that he is not a filthy debauchee?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. And wherein lies the harm of being so?

JUST DISCOURSE. Is there anything worse than to have such a character?

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Now what will you say, if I beat you even on this point?

JUST DISCOURSE. I should certainly have to be silent then.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Well then, reply! Our advocates, what are they?

JUST DISCOURSE. Low scum.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Nothing is more true. And our tragic poets?

JUST DISCOURSE. Low scum.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Well said again. And our demagogues?

JUST DISCOURSE. Low scum.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. You admit that you have spoken nonsense. And the spectators, what are they for the most part? Look at them.

JUST DISCOURSE. I am looking at them.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. Well! What do you see?

JUST DISCOURSE. By the gods, they are nearly all low scum. See, this one I know to be such and that one and that other with the long hair.

UNJUST DISCOURSE. What have you to say, then?

JUST DISCOURSE. I am beaten. Debauchees! in the name of the gods, receive my cloak; I pass over to your ranks.

SOCRATES. Well then! do you take away your son or do you wish me to teach him how to speak?

STREPSIADES. Teach him, chastise him and do not fail to sharpen his tongue well, on one side for petty law-suits and on the other for important cases.

SOCRATES. Make yourself easy, I shall return to you an accomplished sophist.

PHIDIPIDES. Very pale then and thoroughly hang-dog-looking.

STREPSIADES. Take him with you.

PHIDIPIDES. I do assure you, you will repent it.

CHORUS. Judges, we are all about to tell you what you will gain by awarding us the crown as equity requires of you. In spring, when you wish to give your fields the first dressing, we will rain upon you first; the others shall wait. Then we will watch over your corn and over your vine-stocks; they will have no excess to fear, neither of heat nor of wet. But if a mortal dares to insult the goddesses of the Clouds, let him think of the ills we shall pour upon him. For him neither wine nor any harvest at all! Our terrible slings will mow down his young olive plants and his vines. If he is making bricks, it will rain, and our round hailstones will break the tiles of his roof. If he himself marries or any of his relations or friends, we shall cause rain to fall the whole night long. Verily, he would prefer to live in Egypt than to have given this iniquitous verdict.

STREPSIADES. Another four, three, two days, then the eve, then the day, the fatal day of payment! I tremble, I quake, I shudder, for 'tis the day of the old moon and the new. Then all my creditors take the oath, pay their deposits, swear my downfall and my ruin. As for me, I beseech them to be reasonable, to be just, "My friend, do not demand this sum, wait a little for this other and give me time for this third one." Then they will pretend that at this rate they will never be repaid, will accuse me of bad faith and will threaten me



with the law. Well then, let them sue me! I care nothing for that, if only Phidippides has learnt to speak fluently. I go to find out, let me knock at the door of the school. . . . Ho! slave, slave!

SOCRATES. Welcome! Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES. Welcome! Socrates! But first take this sack (*offers him a sack of flour*); it is right to reward the master with some present. And my son, whom you took off lately, has he learnt this famous reasoning, tell me.

SOCRATES. He has learnt it.

STREPSIADES. What a good thing! Oh! thou divine Knavery!

SOCRATES. You will win just as many causes as you choose.

STREPSIADES. Even if I have borrowed before witnesses?

SOCRATES. So much the better, even if there are a thousand of 'em!

STREPSIADES. Then I am going to shout with all my might. "Woe to the usurers, woe to their capital and their interest and their compound interest! You shall play me no more bad turns. My son is being taught there, his tongue is being sharpened into a double-edged weapon; he is my defender, the saviour of my house, the ruin of my foes! His poor father was crushed down with misfortune and he delivers him." Go and call him to me quickly. Oh! my child! my dear little one! run forward to your father's voice!

SOCRATES. Here he is.

STREPSIADES. Oh, my friend, my dearest friend!

SOCRATES. Take your son, and get you gone.

STREPSIADES. Oh, my son! oh! oh! what a pleasure to see your pallor! You are ready first to deny and then to contradict; 'tis as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, "What have you to say now?" How well you know, I am certain, to put on the look of a victim, when it is you who are making both victims and dupes! and what a truly Attic glance! Come, 'tis for you to save me, seeing it is you who have ruined me.

PHIDIPPIDES. What is it you fear then?

STREPSIADES. The day of the old and the new.

PHIDIPPIDES. Is there then a day of the old and the new?

STREPSIADES. The day on which they threaten to pay deposit against me.

PHIDIPPIDES. Then so much the worse for those who have deposited! for 'tis not possible for one day to be two.

STREPSIADES. What?

PHIDIPPIDES. Why, undoubtedly, unless a woman can be both old and young at the same time.

STREPSIADES. But so runs the law.

PHIDIPPIDES. I think the meaning of the law is quite misunderstood.

STREPSIADES. What does it mean?

PHIDIPPIDES. Old Solon loved the people.

STREPSIADES. What has that to do with the old day and the new?

PHIDIPPIDES. He has fixed two days for the summons, the last day of the old moon and the first day of the new; but the deposits must only be paid on the first day of the new moon.



STREPSIADES. And why did he also name the last day of the old?

PHIDIPPIDES. So, my dear sir, that the debtors, being there the day before, might free themselves by mutual agreement, or that else, if not, the creditor might begin his action on the morning of the new moon.

STREPSIADES. Why then do the magistrates have the deposits paid on the last of the month and not the next day?

PHIDIPPIDES. I think they do as the gluttons do, who are the first to pounce upon the dishes. Being eager to carry off these deposits, they have them paid in a day too soon.

STREPSIADES. Splendid! Ah! poor brutes, who serve for food to us clever folk! You are only down here to swell the number, true blockheads, sheep for shearing, heap of empty pots! Hence I will sound the note of victory for my son and myself. "Oh! happy, Strepsiades! what cleverness is thine! and what a son thou hast here!" Thus my friends and my neighbours will say, jealous at seeing me gain all my suits. But come in, I wish to regale you first.

PASIAS (*to his witness*). A man should never lend a single obolus. 'Twould be better to put on a brazen face at the outset than to get entangled in such matters. I want to see my money again and I bring you here to-day to attest the loan. I am going to make a foe of a neighbour; but, as long as I live, I do not wish my country to have to blush for me. Come, I am going to summon Strepsiades.

STREPSIADES. Who is this?

PASIAS. . . . for the old day and the new.

STREPSIADES. I call you to witness, that he has named two days. What do you want of me?

PASIAS. I claim of you the twelve minæ, which you borrowed from me to buy the dapple-grey horse.

STREPSIADES. A horse! do you hear him? I, who detest horses, as is well known.

PASIAS. I call Zeus to witness, that you swore by the gods to return them to me.

STREPSIADES. Because at that time, by Zeus! Phidippides did not yet know the irrefutable argument.

PASIAS. Would you deny the debt on that account?

STREPSIADES. If not, what use is his science to me?

PASIAS. Will you dare to swear by the gods that you owe me nothing?

STREPSIADES. By which gods?

PASIAS. By Zeus, Hermes and Posidon!

STREPSIADES. Why, I would give three obols for the pleasure of swearing by them.

PASIAS. Woe upon you, impudent knave!

STREPSIADES. Oh! what a fine wine-skin you would make if flayed!

PASIAS. Heaven! he jeers at me!

STREPSIADES. It would hold six gallons easily.

PASIAS. By great Zeus! by all the gods! you shall not scoff at me with impunity.

STREPSIADES. Ah! how you amuse me with your gods! how ridiculous it seems to a sage to hear Zeus invoked.

PASIAS. Your blasphemies will one day meet their reward. But, come, will you repay me my money, yes or no? Answer me, that I may go.

STREPSIADES. Wait a moment, I am going to give you a distinct answer. (*Goes indoors and returns immediately with a kneading-trough.*)

PASIAS. What do you think he will do?

WITNESS. He will pay the debt.

STREPSIADES. Where is the man who demands money? Tell me, what is this?

PASIAS. Him? Why, he is your kneading-trough.

STREPSIADES. And you dare to demand money of me, when you are so ignorant? I will not return an obolus to anyone who says *him* instead of *her* for a kneading-trough.

PASIAS. You will not repay?

STREPSIADES. Not if I know it. Come, an end to this, pack off as quick as you can.

PASIAS. I go, but, may I die, if it be not to pay my deposit for a summons.

STREPSIADES. Very well! 'Twill be so much more to the bad to add to the twelve minæ. But truly it makes me sad, for I do pity a poor simpleton who says *him* for a kneading-trough.

AMYNIAS. Woe! ah woe is me!

STREPSIADES. Hold! who is this whining fellow? Can it be one of the gods of Carcinus?

AMYNIAS. Do you want to know who I am? I am a man of misfortune!

STREPSIADES. Get on your way then.

AMYNIAS. Oh! cruel god! Oh Fate, who hath broken the wheels of my chariot! Oh, Pallas, thou hast undone me!

STREPSIADES. What ill has Tlepolemus done you?

AMYNIAS. Instead of jeering me, friend, make your son return me the money he has had of me; I am already unfortunate enough.

STREPSIADES. What money?

AMYNIAS. The money he borrowed of me.

STREPSIADES. You have indeed had misfortune, it seems to me.

AMYNIAS. Yes, by the gods! I have been thrown from a chariot.

STREPSIADES. Why then drivell as if you had fallen from an ass?

AMYNIAS. Am I drivelling because I demand my money?

STREPSIADES. No, no, you cannot be in your right senses.

AMYNIAS. Why?

STREPSIADES. No doubt your poor wits have had a shake.

AMYNIAS. But by Hermes! I will sue you at law, if you do not pay me.

STREPSIADES. Just tell me; do you think it is always fresh water that Zeus lets fall every time it rains, or is it always the same water that the sun pumps over the earth?

AMYNIAS. I neither know, nor care.

STREPSIADES. And actually you would claim the right to demand your money, when you know not a syllable of these celestial phenomena?

AMYNIAS. If you are short, pay me the interest, at any rate.

STREPSIADES. What kind of animal is interest?

AMYNIAS. What? Does not the sum borrowed go on growing, growing every month, each day as the time slips by?

STREPSIADES. Well put. But do you believe there is more water in the sea now than there was formerly?

AMYNIAS. No, 'tis just the same quantity. It cannot increase.

STREPSIADES. Thus, poor fool, the sea, that receives the rivers, never grows, and yet you would have your money grow? Get you gone, away with you, quick! Ho! bring me the ox-goad!

AMYNIAS. Hither! you witnesses there!

STREPSIADES. Come, what are you waiting for? Will you not budge, old nag!

AMYNIAS. What an insult!

STREPSIADES. Unless you get a-trotting, I shall catch you and prick up your behind, you sorry packhorse! Ah! you start, do you? I was about to drive you pretty fast, I tell you—you and your wheels and your chariot!

CHORUS. Whither does the passion of evil lead! here is a perverse old man, who wants to cheat his creditors; but some mishap, which will speedily punish this rogue for his shameful schemings, cannot fail to overtake him from to-day. For a long time he has been burning to have his son know how to fight against all justice and right and to gain even the most iniquitous causes against his adversaries every one. I think this wish is going to be fulfilled. But mayhap, mayhap, he will soon wish his son were dumb rather!

STREPSIADES. Oh! oh! neighbours, kinsmen, fellow-citizens, help! help! to the rescue, I am being beaten! Oh! my head! oh! my jaw! Scoundrel! do you beat your own father!

PHIDIPPIDES. Yes, father, I do.

STREPSIADES. See! he admits he is beating me.

PHIDIPPIDES. Undoubtedly I do.

STREPSIADES. You villain, you parricide, you gallows-bird!

PHIDIPPIDES. Go on, repeat your epithets, call me a thousand other names, an it please you. The more you curse, the greater my amusement!

STREPSIADES. Oh! you infamous cynic!

PHIDIPPIDES. How fragrant the perfume breathed forth in your words.

STREPSIADES. Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPPIDES. Aye, by Zeus! and I am going to show you that I do right in beating you.

STREPSIADES. Oh, wretch! can it be right to beat a father?

PHIDIPPIDES. I will prove it to you, and you shall own yourself vanquished.

STREPSIADES. Own myself vanquished on a point like this?

PHIDIPPIDES. 'Tis the easiest thing in the world. Choose whichever of the two reasonings you like.

STREPSIADES. Of which reasonings?

PHIDIPPIDES. The Stronger and the Weaker.

STREPSIADES. Miserable fellow! Why, 'tis I who had you taught how to refute what is right, and now you would persuade me it is right a son should beat his father.

PHIDIPIDES. I think I shall convince you so thoroughly that, when you have heard me, you will not have a word to say.

STREPSIADES. Well, I am curious to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS. Consider well, old man, how you can best triumph over him. His brazenness shows me that he thinks himself sure of his case; he has some argument which gives him nerve. Note the confidence in his look! But how did the fight begin? tell the Chorus; you cannot help doing that much.

STREPSIADES. I will tell you what was the start of the quarrel. At the end of the meal you wot of, I bade him take his lyre and sing me the air of Simonides, which tells of the fleece of the ram. He replied bluntly, that it was stupid, while drinking, to play the lyre and sing, like a woman when she is grinding barley.

PHIDIPIDES. Why, by rights I ought to have beaten and kicked you the very moment you told me to sing!

STREPSIADES. That is just how he spoke to me in the house, furthermore he added, that Simonides was a detestable poet. However, I mastered myself and for a while said nothing. Then I said to him, "At least, take a myrtle branch and recite a passage from Æschylus to me."—"For my own part," he at once replied, "I look upon Æschylus as the first of poets, for his verses roll superbly; 'tis nothing but incoherence, bombast and turgidness." Yet still I smothered my wrath and said, "Then recite one of the famous pieces from the modern poets." Then he commenced a piece in which Euripides shows, oh! horror! a brother, who violates his own uterine sister. Then I could no longer restrain myself, and attacked him with the most injurious abuse; naturally he retorted; hard words were hurled on both sides, and finally he sprang at me, broke my bones, bore me to earth, strangled and started killing me!

PHIDIPIDES. I was right. What! not praise Euripides, the greatest of our poets!

STREPSIADES. He the greatest of our poets! Ah! if I but dared to speak! but the blows would rain upon me harder than ever.

PHIDIPIDES. Undoubtedly and rightly too.

STREPSIADES. Rightly! oh! what impudence! to me, who brought you up! when you could hardly lisp, I guessed what you wanted. If you said *broo, broo*, well, I brought you your milk; if you asked for *mam mam*, I gave you bread; and you had no sooner said, *caca*, then I took you outside and held you out. And just now, when you were strangling me, I shouted, I bellowed that I would let all go; and you, you scoundrel, had not the heart to take me outside, so that here, though almost choking, I was compelled to ease myself.

CHORUS. Young men, your hearts must be panting with impatience. What is Phidippides going to say? If, after such conduct, he proves he has done well, I would not give an obolus for the hide of old men. Come, you, who know how to brandish and hurl the keen shafts of the new science, find a way to convince us, give your language an appearance of truth.

PHIDIPIDES. How pleasant it is to know these clever new inventions and to be able to defy the established laws! When I thought only about horses, I was not able to string three words together without a mistake, but now that the



master has altered and improved me and that I live in this world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation, I count on being able to prove satisfactorily that I have done well to thrash my father.

STREPSIADES. Mount your horse! By Zeus! I would rather defray the keep of a four-in-hand team than be battered with blows.

PHIDIPPIDES. I revert to what I was saying when you interrupted me. And first, answer me, did you beat me in my childhood?

STREPSIADES. Why, assuredly, for your good and in your own best interest.

PHIDIPPIDES. Tell me, is it not right, that in turn I should beat you for your good? since it is for a man's own best interest to be beaten. What! must your body be free of blows, and not mine? am I not free-born too? the children are to weep and the fathers go free?

STREPSIADES. But . . .

PHIDIPPIDES. You will tell me, that according to the law, 'tis the lot of children to be beaten. But I reply that the old men are children twice over and that it is far more fitting to chastise them than the young, for there is less excuse for their faults.

STREPSIADES. But the law nowhere admits that fathers should be treated thus.

PHIDIPPIDES. Was not the legislator who carried this law a man like you and me? In those days he got men to believe him; then why should not I too have the right to establish for the future a new law, allowing children to beat their fathers in turn? We make you a present of all the blows which were received before this law, and admit that you thrashed us with impunity. But look how the cocks and other animals fight with their fathers; and yet what difference is there betwixt them and ourselves, unless it be that they do not propose decrees?

STREPSIADES. But if you imitate the cocks in all things, why don't you scratch up the dunghill, why don't you sleep on a perch?

PHIDIPPIDES. That has no bearing on the case, good sir; Socrates would find no connection, I assure you.

STREPSIADES. Then do not beat at all, for otherwise you have only yourself to blame afterwards.

PHIDIPPIDES. What for?

STREPSIADES. I have the right to chastise you, and you to chastise your son, if you have one.

PHIDIPPIDES. And if I have not, I shall have cried in vain, and you will die laughing in my face.

STREPSIADES. What say you, all here present? It seems to me that he is right, and I am of opinion that they should be accorded their right. If we think wrongly, 'tis but just we should be beaten.

PHIDIPPIDES. Again, consider this other point.

STREPSIADES. 'Twill be the death of me.

PHIDIPPIDES. But you will certainly feel no more anger because of the blows I have given you.

STREPSIADES. Come, show me what profit I shall gain from it.



PHIDIPPIDES. I shall beat my mother just as I have you.

STREPSIADES. What do you say? what's that you say? Hah! this is far worse still.

PHIDIPPIDES. And what if I prove to you by our school reasoning, that one ought to beat one's mother?

STREPSIADES. Ah! if you do that, then you will only have to throw yourself, along with Socrates and his reasoning, into the Barathrum. Oh! Clouds! all our troubles emanate from you, from you, to whom I entrusted myself, body and soul.

CHORUS. No, you alone are the cause, because you have pursued the path of evil.

STREPSIADES. Why did you not say so then, instead of egging on a poor ignorant old man?

CHORUS. We always act thus, when we see a man conceive a passion for what is evil; we strike him with some terrible disgrace, so that he may learn to fear the gods.

STREPSIADES. Alas! oh Clouds! 'tis hard indeed, but 'tis just! I ought not to have cheated my creditors. . . . But come, my dear son, come with me to take vengeance on this wretched Chærephon and on Socrates, who have deceived us both.

PHIDIPPIDES. I shall do nothing against our masters.

STREPSIADES. Oh! show some reverence for ancestral Zeus!

PHIDIPPIDES. Mark him and his ancestral Zeus! What a fool you are! Does any such being as Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES. Why, assuredly.

PHIDIPPIDES. No, a thousand times no! The ruler of the world is the Whirlwind, that has unseated Zeus.

STREPSIADES. He has not dethroned him. I believed it, because of this whirligig here. Unhappy wretch that I am! I have taken a piece of clay to be a god.

PHIDIPPIDES. Very well! Keep your stupid nonsense for your own consumption. (*Exit.*)

STREPSIADES. Oh! what madness! I had lost my reason when I threw over the gods through Socrates' seductive phrases. Oh! good Hermes, do not destroy me in your wrath. Forgive me; their babbling had driven me crazy. Be my councillor. Shall I pursue them at law or shall I . . . ? Order and I obey.—You are right, no law-suit; but up! let us burn down the home of those praters. Here, Xanthias, here! take a ladder, come forth and arm yourself with an axe; now mount upon the school, demolish the roof, if you love your master, and may the house fall in upon them. Ho! bring me a blazing torch! There is more than one of them, arch-impostors as they are, on whom I am determined to have vengeance.

A DISCIPLE. Oh! oh!

STREPSIADES. Come, torch, do your duty! Burst into full flame!

DISCIPLE. What are you up to?

STREPSIADES. What am I up to? Why, I am entering upon a subtle argument with the beams of the house.

SECOND DISCIPLE. Hullo! hullo! who is burning down our house?

STREPSIADES. The man whose cloak you have appropriated.

SECOND DISCIPLE. But we are dead men, dead men!

STREPSIADES. That is just exactly what I hope, unless my axe plays me false, or I fall and break my neck.

SOCRATES. Hi! you fellow on the roof, what are you doing up there?

STREPSIADES. I traverse the air and contemplate the sun.

SOCRATES. Ah! ah! woe is upon me! I am suffocating!

CHÆREPHON. Ah! you insulted the gods! Ah! you studied the face of the moon! Chase them, strike and beat them down! Forward! they have richly deserved their fate—above all, by reason of their blasphemies.

CHORUS. So let the Chorus file off the stage. Its part is played.

# THE FROGS

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DIONYSUS.

XANTHIAS, *his Servant.*

HERACLES.

A DEAD MAN.

CHARON.

ÆACUS.

FEMALE ATTENDANT OF PERSEPHONÉ.

INNKEEPERS' WIVES.

EURIPIDES.

ÆSCHYLUS.

PLUTO.

CHORUS OF FROGS.

CHORUS OF INITIATES.

SCENE:—In front of the temple of Heracles, and on the banks of Acheron in the Infernal Regions.

XANTHIAS. Now am I to make one of those jokes that have the knack of always making the spectators laugh?

DIONYSUS. Aye, certainly, any one you like, excepting "I am worn out." Take care you don't say that, for it gets on my nerves.

XANTHIAS. Do you want some other drollery?

DIONYSUS. Yes, only not, "I am quite broken up."

XANTHIAS. Then what witty thing shall I say?

DIONYSUS. Come, take courage; only . . .

XANTHIAS. Only what?

DIONYSUS. . . . don't start saying as you shift your package from shoulder to shoulder, "Ah! that's a relief!"

XANTHIAS. May I not at least say, that unless I am relieved of this cursed load I shall let wind?

DIONYSUS. Oh! for pity's sake, no! you don't want to make me spew.

XANTHIAS. What need then had I to take this luggage, if I must not copy the porters that Phrynichus, Lycis and Amipsias never fail to put on the stage?

DIONYSUS. Do nothing of the kind. Whenever I chance to see one of these stage tricks, I always leave the theatre feeling a good year older.

XANTHIAS. Oh! my poor back! you are broken and I am not allowed to make a single joke.

DIONYSUS. Just mark the insolence of this Sybarite! I, Dionysus, the son of a . . . wine-jar, I walk, I tire myself, and I set yonder rascal upon an ass, that he may not have the burden of carrying his load.

XANTHIAS. But am I not carrying it?

DIONYSUS. No, since you are on your beast.

XANTHIAS. Nevertheless I am carrying this . . .

DIONYSUS. What?

XANTHIAS. . . . and it is very heavy.

DIONYSUS. But this burden you carry is borne by the ass.

XANTHIAS. What I have here, 'tis certainly I who bear it, and not the ass, no, by all the gods, most certainly not!

DIONYSUS. How can you claim to be carrying it, when you are carried?

XANTHIAS. That I can't say; but this shoulder is broken, anyhow.

DIONYSUS. Well then, since you say that the ass is no good to you, pick her up in your turn and carry her.

XANTHIAS. What a pity I did not fight at sea; I would baste your ribs for that joke.

DIONYSUS. Dismount, you clown! Here is a door, at which I want to make my first stop. Hi! slave! hi! hi! slave!

HERACLES (*from inside the Temple*). Do you want to beat in the door? He knocks like a Centaur. Why, what's the matter?

DIONYSUS. Xanthias!

XANTHIAS. Well?

DIONYSUS. Did you notice?

XANTHIAS. What?

DIONYSUS. How I frightened him?

XANTHIAS. Bah! you're mad!

HERACLES. Ho, by Demeter! I cannot help laughing; it's no use biting my lips, I must laugh.

DIONYSUS. Come out, friend; I have need of you.

HERACLES. Oh! 'tis enough to make a fellow hold his sides to see this lion's-skin over a saffron robe! What does this mean? Buskins and a bludgeon! What connection have they? Where are you off to in this rig?

DIONYSUS. When I went aboard Clisthenes . . .

HERACLES. Did you fight?

DIONYSUS. We sank twelve or thirteen ships of the enemy.

HERACLES. You?

DIONYSUS. Aye, by Apollo!

HERACLES. You have dreamt it.

DIONYSUS. As I was reading the "Andromeda" on the ship, I suddenly felt my heart afire with a wish so violent . . .

HERACLES. A wish! of what nature?

DIONYSUS. Oh, quite small, like Molon.

HERACLES. You wished for a woman?

DIONYSUS. No.

HERACLES. A young boy, then?

DIONYSUS. Nothing of the kind.

HERACLES. A man?

DIONYSUS. Faugh!

HERACLES. Might you then have had dealings with Clisthenes?

DIONYSUS. Have mercy, brother; no mockery! I am quite ill, so greatly does my desire torment me!

HERACLES. And what desire is it, little brother?

DIONYSUS. I cannot disclose it, but I will convey it to you by hints. Have you ever been suddenly seized with a desire for pea-soup?

HERACLES. For pea-soup! oh! oh! yes, a thousand times in my life.

DIONYSUS. Do you take me or shall I explain myself in some other way?

HERACLES. Oh! as far as the pea-soup is concerned, I understand marvelously well.

DIONYSUS. So great is the desire, which devours me, for Euripides.

HERACLES. But he is dead.

DIONYSUS. There is no human power can prevent my going to him.

HERACLES. To the bottom of Hades?

DIONYSUS. Aye, and further than the bottom, an it need.

HERACLES. And what do you want with him?

DIONYSUS. I want a master poet; "some are dead and gone, and others are good for nothing."

HERACLES. Is Iophon dead then?

DIONYSUS. He is the only good one left me, and even of him I don't know quite what to think.

HERACLES. Then there's Sophocles, who is greater than Euripides; if you must absolutely bring someone back from Hades, why not make him live again?

DIONYSUS. No, not until I have taken Iophon by himself and tested him for what he is worth. Besides, Euripides is very artful and won't leave a stone unturned to get away with me, whereas Sophocles is as easy-going with Pluto as he was when on earth.

HERACLES. And Agathon? Where is he?

DIONYSUS. He has left me; 'twas a good poet and his friends regret him.

HERACLES. And whither has the poor fellow gone?

DIONYSUS. To the banquet of the blest.

HERACLES. And Xenocles?

DIONYSUS. May the plague seize him!

HERACLES. And Pythangelus?

XANTHIAS. They don't say ever a word of poor me, whose shoulder is quite shattered.

HERACLES. Is there not a crowd of other little lads, who produce tragedies by the thousand and are a thousand times more loquacious than Euripides?

DIONYSUS. They are little sapless twigs, chatterboxes, who twitter like the swallows, destroyers of the art, whose aptitude is withered with a single piece



and who sputter forth all their talent to the tragic Muse at their first attempt. But look where you will, you will not find a creative poet who gives vent to a noble thought.

HERACLES. How creative?

DIONYSUS. Aye, creative, who dares to risk "the ethereal dwellings of Zeus," or "the wing of Time," or "a heart that is above swearing by the sacred emblems," and "a tongue that takes an oath, while yet the soul is unpledged."

HERACLES. Is that the kind of thing that pleases you?

DIONYSUS. I'm more than madly fond of it.

HERACLES. But such things are simply idiotic, you feel it yourself.

DIONYSUS. "Don't come trespassing on my mind; you have a brain of your own to keep thoughts in."

HERACLES. But nothing could be more detestable.

DIONYSUS. Where cookery is concerned, you can be my master.

XANTHIAS. They don't say a thing about me!

DIONYSUS. If I have decked myself out according to your pattern, 'tis that you may tell me, in case I should need them, all about the hosts who received you, when you journeyed to Cerberus; tell me of them as well as of the harbours, the bakeries, the brothels, the drinking-shops, the fountains, the roads, the eating houses and of the hostels where there are the fewest bugs.

XANTHIAS. They never speak of me.

HERACLES. Go down to hell? Will you be ready to dare that, you madman?

DIONYSUS. Enough of that; but tell me the shortest road, that is neither too hot nor too cold, to get down to Pluto.

HERACLES. Let me see, what is the best road to show you? Aye, which? Ah! there's the road of the gibbet and the rope. Go and hang yourself.

DIONYSUS. Be silent! your road is choking me.

HERACLES. There is another path, both very short and well-trodden; the one that goes through the mortar.

DIONYSUS. 'Tis hemlock you mean to say.

HERACLES. Precisely so.

DIONYSUS. That road is both cold and icy. Your legs get frozen at once.

HERACLES. Do you want me to tell you a very steep road, one that descends very quickly?

DIONYSUS. Ah! with all my heart; I don't like long walks.

HERACLES. Go to the Ceramicus.

DIONYSUS. And then?

HERACLES. Mount to the top of the highest tower . . .

DIONYSUS. To do what?

HERACLES. . . . and there keep your eye on the torch, which is to be the signal. When the spectators demand it to be flung, fling yourself . . .

DIONYSUS. Where?

HERACLES. . . . down.

DIONYSUS. But I should break the two hemispheres of my brain. Thanks for your road, but I don't want it.

HERACLES. But which one then?

DIONYSUS. The one you once travelled yourself.

HERACLES. Ah! that's a long journey. First you will reach the edge of the vast, deep mere of Acheron.

DIONYSUS. And how is that to be crossed?

HERACLES. There is an ancient ferryman, Charon by name, who will pass you over in his little boat for a diobolus.

DIONYSUS. Oh! what might the diobolus has everywhere! But however has it got as far as that?

HERACLES. 'Twas Theseus who introduced its vogue. After that you will see snakes and all sorts of fearful monsters . . .

DIONYSUS. Oh! don't try to frighten me and make me afraid, for I am quite decided.

HERACLES. . . . then a great slough with an eternal stench, a veritable cess-pool, into which those are plunged who have wronged a guest, cheated a young boy out of the fee for his complaisance, beaten their mother, boxed their father's ears, taken a false oath or transcribed some tirade of Morsimus.

DIONYSUS. For mercy's sake, add likewise—or learnt the Pyrrhic dance of Cinesias.

HERACLES. Further on 'twill be a gentle concert of flutes on every side, a brilliant light, just as there is here, myrtle groves, bands of happy men and women and noisy plaudits.

DIONYSUS. Who are these happy folk?

HERACLES. The Initiate.

XANTHIAS. And I am the ass that carries the Mysteries; but I've had enough of it.

HERACLES. They will give you all the information you will need, for they live close to Pluto's palace, indeed on the road that leads to it. Farewell, brother, and an agreeable journey to you. (*He returns into his Temple.*)

DIONYSUS. And you, good health. Slave! take up your load again.

XANTHIAS. Before having laid it down?

DIONYSUS. And be quick about it too.

XANTHIAS. Oh, no, I adjure you! Rather hire one of the dead, who is going to Hades.

DIONYSUS. And should I not find one . . .

XANTHIAS. Then you can take me.

DIONYSUS. You talk sense. Ah! here they are just bringing a dead man along! Hi! man, 'tis you I'm addressing, you, dead fellow there! Will you carry a package to Pluto for me?

DEAD MAN. Is't very heavy?

DIONYSUS. This. (*He shows him the baggage, which XANTHIAS has laid on the ground.*)

DEAD MAN. You will pay me two drachmæ.

DIONYSUS. Oh! that's too dear.

DEAD MAN. Well then, bearers, move on.

DIONYSUS. Stay, friend, so that I may bargain with you.

DEAD MAN. Give me two drachmæ, or it's no deal.

DIONYSUS. Hold! here are nine obols.

DEAD MAN. I would sooner go back to earth again.

XANTHIAS. Is that cursed rascal putting on airs? Come, then, I'll go.

DIONYSUS. You're a good and noble fellow. Let us make the best of our way to the boat.

CHARON. Ahoy, ahoy! put ashore.

XANTHIAS. What's that?

DIONYSUS. Why, by Zeus, 'tis the mere of which Heracles spoke, and I see the boat.

XANTHIAS. Ah! there's Charon.

DIONYSUS. Hail! Charon.

DEAD MAN. Hail! Charon.

CHARON. Who comes hither from the home of cares and misfortunes to rest on the banks of Lethé? Who comes to the ass's fleece, who is for the land of the Cerberians, or the crows, or Tænarus?

DIONYSUS. I am.

CHARON. Get aboard quick then.

DIONYSUS. Where will you ferry me to? Where are you going to land me?

CHARON. In hell, if you wish. But step in, do.

DIONYSUS. Come here, slave.

CHARON. I carry no slave, unless he has fought to save his skin.

XANTHIAS. But I could not, for my eyes were bad.

CHARON. Well then! be off and walk round the mere.

XANTHIAS. Where shall I come to a halt?

CHARON. At the stone of Auænus, near the drinking-shop.

DIONYSUS. Do you understand?

XANTHIAS. Perfectly. Oh! unhappy wretch that I am, surely, surely, I must have met something of evil omen as I came out of the house?

CHARON. Come, sit to your oar. If there be anyone else who wants to cross, let him hurry. Hullo! what are you doing?

DIONYSUS. What am I doing? I am sitting on the oar as you told me.

CHARON. Will you please have the goodness to place yourself there, pot-belly?

DIONYSUS. There.

CHARON. Put out your hands, stretch your arms.

DIONYSUS. There.

CHARON. No tomfoolery! row hard, and put some heart into the work!

DIONYSUS. Row! and how can I? I, who have never set foot on a ship?

CHARON. There's nothing easier; and once you're at work, you will hear some enchanting singers.

DIONYSUS. Who are they?

CHARON. Frogs with the voices of swans; 'tis most delightful.

DIONYSUS. Come, set the stroke.

CHARON. Yo ho! yo ho!

FROGS. Brekekekex, coax, coax, brekekekex, coax. Slimy offspring of the marshland, let our harmonious voices mingle with the sounds of the flute, coax, coax! let us repeat the songs that we sing in honour of the Nysæan Dionysus on the day of the feast of pots, when the drunken throng reels towards our temple in the Linnæ. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. I am beginning to feel my bottom getting very sore, my dear little coax, coax.

FROGS. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. But doubtless you don't care.

FROGS. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. May you perish with your coax, your endless coax!

FROGS. And why change it, you great fool? I am beloved by the Muses with the melodious lyre, by the goat-footed Pan, who draws soft tones out of his reed; I am the delight of Apollo, the god of the lyre, because I make the rushes, which are used for the bridge of the lyre, grow in my marshes. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. I have got blisters and my behind is all of a sweat; by dint of constant movement, it will soon be saying . . .

FROGS. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. Come, race of croakers, be quiet.

FROGS. Not we; we shall only cry the louder. On fine sunny days, it pleases us to hop through galingale and sedge and to sing while we swim; and when Zeus is pouring down his rain, we join our lively voices to the rustle of the drops. Brekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. I forbid you to do it.

FROGS. Oh! that would be too hard!

DIONYSUS. And is it not harder for me to wear myself out with rowing?

FROGS. Brekekekex, coax, coax.

DIONYSUS. May you perish! I don't care.

FROGS. And from morning till night we will shriek with the whole width of our gullets, "Brekekekex, coax, coax."

DIONYSUS. I will cry louder than you all.

FROGS. Oh! don't do that!

DIONYSUS. Oh, yes, I will. I shall cry the whole day, if necessary, until I no longer hear your coax. (*He begins to cry against the frogs, who finally stop.*) Ah! I knew I would soon put an end to your coax.

CHARON. Enough, enough, a last pull, ship oars, step ashore and pay your passage money.

DIONYSUS. Look! here are my two obols. . . . Xanthias! where is Xanthias? Hi! Xanthias!

XANTHIAS (*from a distance*). Hullo!

DIONYSUS. Come here.

XANTHIAS. I greet you, master.

DIONYSUS. What is there that way?

XANTHIAS. Darkness and mud!

DIONYSUS. Did you see the parricides and the perjured he told us of?

XANTHIAS. Did you?

DIONYSUS. Ha! by Posidon! I see some of them now. (*He points to the audience.*) Well, what are we going to do?

XANTHIAS. The best is to go on, for 'tis here that the horrible monsters are, Heracles told us of.

DIONYSUS. Ah! the wag! He spun yarns to frighten me, but I am a brave fellow and he is jealous of me. There exists no greater braggart than Heracles. Ah! I wish I might meet some monster, so as to distinguish myself by some deed of daring worthy of my daring journey.

XANTHIAS. Ah! hark! I hear a noise.

DIONYSUS (*all of a tremble*). Where then, where?

XANTHIAS. Behind you.

DIONYSUS. Place yourself behind me.

XANTHIAS. Ah! 'tis in front now.

DIONYSUS. Then pass to the front.

XANTHIAS. Oh! what a monster I can see!

DIONYSUS. What's it like?

XANTHIAS. Dreadful, terrible! it assumes every shape; now 'tis a bull, then a mule; again it is a most beautiful woman.

DIONYSUS. Where is she that I may run toward her?

XANTHIAS. The monster is no longer a woman; 'tis now a dog.

DIONYSUS. Then it is the Empusa.

XANTHIAS. Its whole face is ablaze.

DIONYSUS. And it has a brazen leg?

XANTHIAS. Aye, i' faith! and the other is an ass's leg, rest well assured of that.

DIONYSUS. Where shall I fly to?

XANTHIAS. And I?

DIONYSUS. Priest, save me, that I may drink with you.

XANTHIAS. Oh! mighty Heracles! we are dead men.

DIONYSUS. Silence! I adjure you. Don't utter that name.

XANTHIAS. Well then, we are dead men, Dionysus!

DIONYSUS. That still less than the other.

XANTHIAS. Keep straight on, master, here, here, this way.

DIONYSUS. Well?

XANTHIAS. Be at ease, all goes well and we can say with Hegelochus, "After the storm, I see the return of the *cat*." The Empusa has gone.

DIONYSUS. Swear it to me.

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!

DIONYSUS. Swear it again.

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!

DIONYSUS. Once more.

XANTHIAS. By Zeus!



DIONYSUS. Oh! my god! how white I went at the sight of the Empusa! But yonder fellow got red instead, so horribly afraid was he! Alas! to whom do I owe this terrible meeting? What god shall I accuse of having sought my death? Might it be "the Æther, the dwelling of Zeus," or "the wing of Time"?

XANTHIAS. Hist!

DIONYSUS. What's the matter?

XANTHIAS. Don't you hear?

DIONYSUS. What then?

XANTHIAS. The sound of flutes.

DIONYSUS. Aye, certainly, and the wind wafts a smell of torches hither, which bespeaks the Mysteries a league away. But make no noise; let us hide ourselves and listen.

CHORUS. Iacchus, oh! Iacchus! Iacchus, oh! Iacchus!

XANTHIAS. Master, these are the initiates, of whom Heracles spoke and who are here at their sports; they are incessantly singing of Iacchus, just like Diagoras.

DIONYSUS. I believe you are right, but 'tis best to keep ourselves quiet till we get better information.

CHORUS. Iacchus, venerated god, hasten at our call. Iacchus, oh! Iacchus! come into this meadow, thy favourite resting-place; come to direct the sacred choirs of the Initiate; may a thick crown of fruit-laden myrtle branches rest on thy head and may thy bold foot step this free and joyful dance, taught us by the Graces—this pure, religious measure, that our sacred choirs rehearse.

XANTHIAS. Oh! thou daughter of Demeter, both mighty and revered, what a delicious odour of pork!

DIONYSUS. Cannot you keep still then, fellow, once you get a whiff of a bit of tripe?

CHORUS. Brandish the flaming torches and so revive their brilliancy. Iacchus, oh! Iacchus! bright luminary of our nocturnal Mysteries. The meadow sparkles with a thousand fires; the aged shake off the weight of cares and years; they have once more found limbs of steel, wherewith to take part in thy sacred measures; and do thou, blessed deity, lead the dances of youth upon this dewy carpet of flowers with a torch in thine hand.

Silence, make way for our choirs, you profane and impure souls, who have neither been present at the festivals of the noble Muses, nor ever footed a dance in their honour, and who are not initiated into the mysterious language of the dithyrambs of the voracious Cratinus; away from here he who applauds misplaced buffoonery. Away from here the bad citizen, who for his private ends fans and nurses the flame of sedition, the chief who sells himself, when his country is weathering the storms, and surrenders either fortresses or ships; who, like Thorycion, the wretched collector of tolls, sends prohibited goods from Ægina to Epidaurus, such as oar-leathers, sailcloth and pitch, and who secures a subsidy for a hostile fleet, or soils the statues of Hecatê, while he is humming some dithyramb. Away from here, the orator who nibbles at the salary of the poets, because he has been scouted in the ancient solemnities of

Dionysus; to all such I say, and I repeat, and I say it again for the third time, "Make way for the choruses of the Initiate." But you, raise you your voice anew; resume your nocturnal hymns as it is meet to do at this festival.

Let each one advance boldly into the retreats of our flowery meads, let him mingle in our dances, let him give vent to jesting, to wit and to satire. Enough of junketing, lead forward! let our voices praise the divine protectress with ardent love, yea! praise her, who promises to assure the welfare of this country for ever, in spite of Thorycion.

Let our hymns now be addressed to Demeter, the Queen of Harvest, the goddess crowned with ears of corn; to her be dedicated the strains of our divine concerts. Oh! Demeter, who presidest over the pure mysteries, help us and protect thy choruses; far from all danger, may I continually yield myself to sports and dancing, mingle laughter with seriousness, as is fitting at thy festivals, and as the reward for my biting sarcasms may I wreath my head with the triumphal fillets. And now let our songs summon hither the lovable goddess, who so often joins in our dances.

Oh, venerated Dionysus, who hast created such soft melodies for this festival, come to accompany us to the goddess, show that you can traverse a long journey without wearying. Dionysus, the king of the dance, guide my steps. 'Tis thou who, to raise a laugh and for the sake of economy, hast torn our sandals and our garments; let us bound, let us dance at our pleasure, for we have nothing to spoil. Dionysus, king of the dance, guide my steps. Just now I saw through a corner of my eye a ravishing young girl, the companion of our sports; I saw the nipple of her bosom peeping through a rent in her tunic. Dionysus, king of the dance, guide my steps.

DIONYSUS. Aye, I like to mingle with these choruses; I would fain dance and sport with that young girl.

XANTHIAS. And I too.

CHORUS. Would you like us to mock together at Archidemus? He is still awaiting his seven-year teeth to have himself entered as a citizen; but he is none the less a chief of the people among the Athenians and the greatest rascal of 'em all. I am told that Clisthenes is tearing the hair out of his rump and lacerating his cheeks on the tomb of Sebinus, the Anaphlystian; with his forehead against the ground, he is beating his bosom and groaning and calling him by name. As for Callias, the illustrious son of Hippobinus, the new Heracles, he is fighting a terrible battle of love on his galleys; dressed up in a lion's skin, he fights a fierce naval battle—with the girls'— . . .

DIONYSUS. Could you tell us where Pluto dwells? We are strangers and have just arrived.

CHORUS. Go no farther, and know without further question that you are at his gates.

DIONYSUS. Slave, pick up your baggage.

XANTHIAS. This wretched baggage, 'tis like Corinth, the daughter of Zeus, for it's always in his mouth.

CHORUS. And now do ye, who take part in this religious festival, dance a gladsome round in the flowery grove in honour of the goddess.

DIONYSUS. As for myself, I will go with the young girls and the women into the enclosure, where the nocturnal ceremonies are held; 'tis I will bear the sacred torch.

CHORUS. Let us go into the meadows, that are sprinkled with roses, to form, according to our rites, the graceful choirs, over which the blessed Fates preside. 'Tis for us alone that the sun doth shine; his glorious rays illumine the Initiate, who have led the pious life, that is equally dear to strangers and citizens.

DIONYSUS. Come now! how should we knock at this door? How do the dwellers in these parts knock?

XANTHIAS. Lose no time and attack the door with vigour, if you have the courage of Heracles as well as his costume.

DIONYSUS. Ho! there! Slave!

ÆACUS. Who's there?

DIONYSUS. Heracles, the bold.

ÆACUS. Ah! wretched, impudent, shameless, threefold rascal, the most rascally of rascals. Ah! 'tis you who hunted out our dog Cerberus, whose keeper I was! But I have got you to-day; and the black stones of Styx, the rocks of Acheron, from which the blood is dripping, and the roaming dogs of Cocytus shall account to me for you; the hundred-headed Hydra shall tear your sides to pieces; the Tartessian Muræna shall fasten itself on your lungs and the Tithrasian Gorgons shall tear your kidneys and your gory entrails to shreds; I will go and fetch them as quickly as possible.

XANTHIAS. Eh! what are you doing there?

DIONYSUS (*stooping down*). I have just defecated myself! Invoke the god.

XANTHIAS. Get up at once. How a stranger would laugh, if he saw you.

DIONYSUS. Ah! I'm fainting. Place a sponge on my heart.

XANTHIAS. Here, take it.

DIONYSUS. Place it yourself.

XANTHIAS. But where? Good gods, where *is* your heart?

DIONYSUS. It has sunk into my shoes with fear. (*Takes his slave's hand holding the sponge, and applies it.*)

XANTHIAS. Oh! you most cowardly of gods and men!

DIONYSUS. What! I cowardly? I, who have asked you for a sponge! 'Tis what no one else would have done.

XANTHIAS. How so?

DIONYSUS. A poltroon would have fallen backwards, being overcome with the fumes; as for me, I got up and moreover I wiped myself clean.

XANTHIAS. Ah! by Posidon! a wonderful feat of intrepidity!

DIONYSUS. Aye, certainly. And you did not tremble at the sound of his threatening words?

XANTHIAS. They never troubled me.

DIONYSUS. Well then, since you are so brave and fearless, become what I am, take this bludgeon and this lion's hide, you, whose heart has no knowledge of fear; I, in return, will carry the baggage.

XANTHIAS. Here, take it, take it quick! 'tis my duty to obey you, and behold, Heracles-Xanthias! Do I look like a coward of your kidney?

DIONYSUS. No. You are the exact image of the god of Melité, dressed up as a rascal. Come, I will take the baggage.

FEMALE ATTENDANT OF PERSEPHONÉ. Ah! is it you then, beloved Heracles? Come in. As soon as ever the goddess, my mistress Persephoné, knew of your arrival, she quickly had the bread into the oven and clapped two or three pots of bruised peas upon the fire; she has had a whole bullock roasted and both cakes and rolls baked. Come in quick!

XANTHIAS. No, thank you.

ATTENDANT. Oh! by Apollo! I shall not let you off. She has also had poultry boiled for you, sweetmeats baked, and has prepared you some delicious wine. Come then, enter with me.

XANTHIAS. I am much obliged.

ATTENDANT. Are you mad? I will not let you go. There is likewise an enchanting flute-girl specially for you, and two or three dancing wenches.

XANTHIAS. What do you say? Dancing wenches?

ATTENDANT. In the prime of their life and all freshly depilated. Come, enter, for the cook was going to take the fish off the fire and the table was being spread.

XANTHIAS. Very well then! Run in quickly and tell the dancing-girls I am coming. Slave! pick up the baggage and follow me.

DIONYSUS. Not so fast! Oh! indeed! I disguise you as Heracles for a joke, and you take the thing seriously! None of your nonsense, Xanthias! Take back the baggage.

XANTHIAS. What? You are not thinking of taking back what you gave me yourself?

DIONYSUS. No, I don't think about it; I do it. Off with that skin!

XANTHIAS. Witness how I am treated, ye great gods, and be my judges!

DIONYSUS. What gods? Are you so stupid, such a fool? How can you, a slave and a mortal, be the son of Alcmena?

XANTHIAS. Come then! 'tis well! take them. But perhaps you will be needing me one day, an it please the gods.

CHORUS. 'Tis the act of a wise and sensible man, who has done much sailing, always to trim his sails towards the quarter whence the fair wind wafts, rather than stand stiff and motionless like a god Terminus. To change your part to serve your own interest is to act like a clever man, a true Theramenes.

DIONYSUS. Faith! 'twould be funny indeed if Xanthias, a slave, were indolently stretched out on purple cushions and worked the dancing-girl; if he were then to ask me for a pot, while I, looking on, would be rubbing me, and this master rogue, on seeing it, were to knock out my front teeth with a blow of his fist.

FIRST INNKEEPER'S WIFE. Here! Plathané, Plathané! do come! here is the rascal who once came into our shop and ate up sixteen loaves for us.

SECOND INNKEEPER'S WIFE. Aye, truly, 'tis he himself!



XANTHIAS. This is turning out rough for somebody.

FIRST WIFE. And besides that, twenty pieces of boiled meat at half an obolus apiece.

XANTHIAS. There's someone going to get punished.

FIRST WIFE. And I don't know how many cloves of garlic.

DIONYSUS. You are rambling, my dear, you don't know what you are saying.

FIRST WIFE. Hah! you thought I should not know you, because of your buskins! And then all the salt fish, I had forgotten that!

SECOND WIFE. And then, alas! the fresh cheese that he devoured, osier baskets and all! Then, when I asked for my money, he started to roar and shoot terrible looks at me.

XANTHIAS. Ah! I recognize him well by that token; 'tis just his way.

SECOND WIFE. And he drew out his sword like a madman.

FIRST WIFE. By the gods, yes.

SECOND WIFE. Terrified to death, we clambered up to the upper story, and he fled at top speed, carrying off our baskets with him.

XANTHIAS. Ah! that is again his style! But you ought to take action.

FIRST WIFE. Run quick and call Cleon, my patron.

SECOND WIFE. And you, should you run against Hyperbolus, bring him to me; we will knock the life out of our robber.

FIRST WIFE. Oh! you miserable glutton! how I should delight in breaking those grinders of yours, which devoured my goods!

SECOND WIFE. And I in hurling you into the malefactor's pit.

FIRST WIFE. And I in slitting with one stroke of the sickle that gullet that bolted down the tripe. But I am going to fetch Cleon; he shall summon you before the court this very day and force you to disgorge.

DIONYSUS. May I die, if Xanthias is not my dearest friend.

XANTHIAS. Aye, aye, I know your bent. Your words are all in vain. I will not be Heracles.

DIONYSUS. Oh! don't say so, my dear little Xanthias.

XANTHIAS. Can I be the son of Alcmena, I, a slave and a mortal?

DIONYSUS. I know, I know, that you are in a fury and you have the right to be; you can even beat me and I will not reply. But if I ever take this costume from you again, may I die of the most fearful torture—I, my wife, my children, all those who belong to me, down to the very last, and blear-eyed Archidemus into the bargain.

XANTHIAS. I accept your oath, and on those terms I agree.

CHORUS. 'Tis now your cue, since you have resumed the dress, to act the brave and to throw terror into your glance, thus recalling the god whom you represent. But if you play your part badly, if you yield to any weakness, you will again have to load your shoulders with the baggage.

XANTHIAS. Friends, your advice is good, but I was thinking the same myself; if there is any good to be got, my master will again want to despoil me of this costume, of that I am quite certain. Ne'ertheless, I am going to show



a fearless heart and shoot forth ferocious looks. And lo! the time for it has come, for I hear a noise at the door.

ÆACUS (*to his slaves*). Bind me this dog-thief, that he may be punished. Hurry yourselves, hurry!

DIONYSUS. This is going to turn out badly for someone.

XANTHIAS. Look to yourselves and don't come near me.

ÆACUS. Hah! you would show fight! Ditylas, Scebylas, Pardocas, come here and have at him!

DIONYSUS. Ah! you would strike him because he has stolen!

XANTHIAS. 'Tis horrible!

DIONYSUS. 'Tis a revolting cruelty!

XANTHIAS. By Zeus! may I die, if I ever came here or stole from you the value of a pin! But I will act nobly; take this slave, put him to the question, and if you obtain the proof of my guilt, put me to death.

ÆACUS. In what manner shall I put him to the question?

XANTHIAS. In every manner; you may lash him to the wooden horse, hang him, cut him open with scourging, flay him, twist his limbs, pour vinegar down his nostrils, load him with bricks, anything you like; only don't beat him with leeks or fresh garlic.

ÆACUS. 'Tis well conceived; but if the blows maim your slave, you will be claiming damages from me.

XANTHIAS. No, certainly not! set about putting him to the question.

ÆACUS. It shall be done here, for I wish him to speak in your presence. Come, put down your pack, and be careful not to lie.

DIONYSUS. I forbid you to torture me, for I am immortal; if you dare it, woe to you!

ÆACUS. What say you?

DIONYSUS. I say that I am an immortal, Dionysus, the son of Zeus, and that this fellow is only a slave.

ÆACUS (*to XANTHIAS*). D'you hear him?

XANTHIAS. Yes. 'Tis all the better reason for beating him with rods, for, if he is a god, he will not feel the blows.

DIONYSUS (*to XANTHIAS*). But why, pray, since you also claim to be a god, should you not be beaten like myself?

XANTHIAS (*to ÆACUS*). That's fair. Very well then, whichever of us two you first see crying and caring for the blows, him believe not to be a god.

ÆACUS. 'Tis spoken like a brave fellow; you don't refuse what is right. Strip yourselves.

XANTHIAS. To do the thing fairly, how do you propose to act?

ÆACUS. Oh! that's easy. I shall hit you one after the other.

XANTHIAS. Well thought of.

ÆACUS. There! (*He strikes XANTHIAS.*)

XANTHIAS. Watch if you see me flinch.

ÆACUS. I have already struck you.

XANTHIAS. No, you haven't.

ÆACUS. Why, you have not felt it at all, I think. Now for t'other one.

DIONYSUS. Be quick about it.

ÆACUS. But I have struck you.

DIONYSUS. Ah! I did not even sneeze. How is that?

ÆACUS. I don't know; come, I will return to the first one.

XANTHIAS. Get it over. Oh, oh!

ÆACUS. What does that "oh, oh!" mean? Did it hurt you?

XANTHIAS. Oh, no! but I was thinking of the feasts of Heracles, which are being held at Diomeia.

ÆACUS. Oh! what a pious fellow! I pass on to the other again.

DIONYSUS. Oh! oh!

ÆACUS. What's wrong?

DIONYSUS. I see some knights.

ÆACUS. Why are you weeping?

DIONYSUS. Because I can smell onions.

ÆACUS. Ha! so you don't care a fig for the blows?

DIONYSUS. Not the least bit in the world.

ÆACUS. Well, let us proceed. Your turn now.

XANTHIAS. Oh, I say!

ÆACUS. What's the matter?

XANTHIAS. Pull out this thorn.

ÆACUS. What? Now the other one again.

DIONYSUS. "Oh, Apollo! . . . King of Delos and Delphi!"

XANTHIAS. He felt that. Do you hear?

DIONYSUS. Why, no! I was quoting an iambic of Hipponax.

XANTHIAS. 'Tis labour in vain. Come, smite his flanks.

ÆACUS. No, present your belly.

DIONYSUS. Oh, Posidon . . .

XANTHIAS. Ah! here's someone who's feeling it.

DIONYSUS. . . . who reignest on the Ægean headland and in the depths of the azure sea.

ÆACUS. By Demeter, I cannot find out which of you is the god. But come in; the master and Persephoné will soon tell you, for they are gods themselves.

DIONYSUS. You are quite right; but you should have thought of that before you beat us.

CHORUS. Oh! Muse, take part in our sacred choruses; our songs will enchant you and you shall see a people of wise men, eager for a nobler glory than that of Cleophon, the braggart, the swallow, who deafens us with his hoarse cries, while perched upon a Thracian tree. He whines in his barbarian tongue and repeats the lament of Philomela with good reason, for even if the votes were equally divided, he would have to perish.

The sacred chorus owes the city its opinion and its wise lessons. First I demand that equality be restored among the citizens, so that none may be disquieted. If there be any whom the artifices of Phrynichus have drawn into any error, let us allow them to offer their excuses and let us forget these old mis-

takes. Furthermore, that there be not a single citizen in Athens who is deprived of his rights; otherwise would it not be shameful to see slaves become masters and treated as honourably as Plataeans, because they helped in a single naval fight? Not that I censure this step, for, on the contrary I approve it; 'tis the sole thing you have done that is sensible. But those citizens, both they and their fathers, have so often fought with you and are allied to you by ties of blood, so ought you not to listen to their prayers and pardon them their single fault? Nature has given you wisdom, therefore let your anger cool and let all those who have fought together on Athenian galleys live in brotherhood and as fellow-citizens, enjoying the same equal rights; to show ourselves proud and intractable about granting the rights of the city, especially at a time when we are riding at the mercy of the waves, is a folly, of which we shall later repent.

If I am adept at reading the destiny or the soul of a man, the fatal hour for little Cligenes is near, that unbearable ape, the greatest rogue of all the washermen, who use a mixture of ashes and Cimolian earth and call it potash. He knows it; hence he is always armed for war; for he fears, if he ventures forth without his bludgeon, he would be stripped of his clothes when he is drunk.

I have often noticed that there are good and honest citizens in Athens, who are as old gold is to new money. The ancient coins are excellent in point of standard; they are assuredly the best of all moneys; they alone are well struck and give a pure ring; everywhere they obtain currency, both in Greece and in strange lands; yet we make no use of them and prefer those bad copper pieces quite recently issued and so wretchedly struck. Exactly in the same way do we deal with our citizens. If we know them to be well-born, sober, brave, honest, adepts in the exercises of the gymnasium and in the liberal arts, they are the butts of our contumely and we have only a use for the petty rubbish, consisting of strangers, slaves and low-born folk not worth a whit more, mushrooms of yesterday, whom formerly Athens would not have even wanted as scapegoats. Madmen, do change your ways at last; employ the honest men afresh; if you are fortunate through doing this, 'twill be but right, and if Fate betrays you, the wise will at least praise you for having fallen honourably.

ÆACUS. By Zeus, the Deliverer! what a brave man your master is.

XANTHIAS. A brave man! I should think so indeed, for he only knows how to drink and to make love!

ÆACUS. He has convicted you of lying and did not thrash the impudent rascal who had dared to call himself the master.

XANTHIAS. Ah! he would have rued it if he had.

ÆACUS. Well spoken! that's a reply that does a slave credit; 'tis thus that I like to act too.

XANTHIAS. How, pray?

ÆACUS. I am beside myself with joy, when I can curse my master in secret.

XANTHIAS. And when you go off grumbling, after having been well thrashed?

ÆACUS. I am delighted.

XANTHIAS. And when you make yourself important?

ÆACUS. I know of nothing sweeter.

XANTHIAS. Ah! by Zeus! we are brothers. And when you are listening to what your masters are saying?

ÆACUS. 'Tis a pleasure that drives me to distraction.

XANTHIAS. And when you repeat it to strangers?

ÆACUS. Oh! I feel as happy as if I were having an ecstasy.

XANTHIAS. By Phœbus Apollo! reach me your hand; come hither, that I may embrace you; and, in the name of Zeus, the Thrashed one, tell me what all this noise means, these shouts, these quarrels, that I can hear going on inside yonder.

ÆACUS. 'Tis Æschylus and Euripides.

XANTHIAS. What do you mean?

ÆACUS. The matter is serious, very serious indeed; all Hades is in commotion.

XANTHIAS. What's it all about?

ÆACUS. We have a law here, according to which, whoever in each of the great sciences and liberal arts beats all his rivals, is fed at the Prytaneum and sits at Pluto's side . . .

XANTHIAS. I know that.

ÆACUS. . . . until someone cleverer than he in the same style of thing comes along; then he has to give way to him.

XANTHIAS. And how has this law disturbed Æschylus?

ÆACUS. He held the chair for tragedy, as being the greatest in his art.

XANTHIAS. And who has it now?

ÆACUS. When Euripides descended here, he started reciting his verses to the cheats, cut-purses, parricides, and brigands, who abound in Hades; his supple and tortuous reasonings filled them with enthusiasm, and they pronounced him the cleverest by far. So Euripides, elated with pride, took possession of the throne on which Æschylus was installed.

XANTHIAS. And did he not get stoned?

ÆACUS. No, but the folk demanded loudly that a regular trial should decide to which of the two the highest place belonged.

XANTHIAS. What folk? this mob of rascals? (*Points to the spectators.*)

ÆACUS. Their clamour reached right up to heaven.

XANTHIAS. And had Æschylus not his friends too?

ÆACUS. Good people are very scarce here, just the same as on earth.

XANTHIAS. What does Pluto reckon to do?

ÆACUS. To open a contest as soon as possible; the two rivals will show their skill, and finally a verdict will be given.

XANTHIAS. What! has not Sophocles also claimed the chair then?

ÆACUS. No, no! he embraced Æschylus and shook his hand, when he came down; he could have taken the seat, for Æschylus vacated it for him; but, according to Clidemides, he prefers to act as his second; if Æschylus triumphs, he will stay modestly where he is, but if not, he has declared that he will contest the prize with Euripides.



XANTHIAS. When is the contest to begin?

ÆACUS. Directly! the battle royal is to take place on this very spot. Poetry is to be weighed in the scales.

XANTHIAS. What? How can tragedy be weighed?

ÆACUS. They will bring rulers and compasses to measure the words, and those forms which are used for moulding bricks, also diameter measures and wedges, for Euripides says he wishes to torture every verse of his rival's tragedies.

XANTHIAS. If I mistake not, Æschylus must be in a rage.

ÆACUS. With lowered head he glares fiercely like a bull.

XANTHIAS. And who will be the judge?

ÆACUS. The choice was difficult; it was seen that there was a dearth of able men. Æschylus took exception to the Athenians . . .

XANTHIAS. No doubt he thought there were too many thieves among them.

ÆACUS. . . . and moreover believed them too light-minded to judge of a poet's merits. Finally they fell back upon your master, because he understands tragic poetry. But let us go in; when the masters are busy, we must look out for blows!

CHORUS. Ah! what fearful wrath will be surging in his heart! what a roar there'll be when he sees the babbler who challenges him sharpening his teeth! how savagely his eyes will roll! What a battle of words like plumed helmets and waving crests hurling themselves against fragile outbursts and wretched parings! We shall see the ingenious architect of style defending himself against immense periods. Then, the close hairs of his thick mane all a-bristle, the giant will knit his terrible brow; he will pull out verses as solidly bolted together as the framework of a ship and will hurl them forth with a roar, while the pretty speaker with the supple and sharpened tongue, who weighs each syllable and submits everything to the lash of his envy, will cut this grand style to mincemeat and reduce to ruins this edifice erected by one good sturdy puff of breath.

EURIPIDES (*to* DIONYSUS). Your advice is in vain; I shall not vacate the chair, for I contend I am superior to him.

DIONYSUS. Æschylus, why do you keep silent? You understand what he says.

EURIPIDES. He is going to stand on his dignity at first; 'tis a trick he never failed to use in his tragedies.

DIONYSUS. My dear fellow, a little less arrogance, please.

EURIPIDES. Oh! I know him for many a day. I have long had a thorough hold of his ferocious heroes, of his high-flown language and of the monstrous blustering words which his great, gaping mouth hurls forth thick and close without curb or measure.

ÆSCHYLUS. Is it indeed you, the son of a rustic goddess, who dare to treat me thus, you, who only know how to collect together stupid sayings and to stitch the rags of your beggars? I shall make you rue your insults.

DIONYSUS. Enough said, Æschylus, calm the wild wrath that is turning your heart into a furnace.



ÆSCHYLUS. No, not until I have clearly shown the true value of this impudent fellow with his lame men.

DIONYSUS. A lamb, a black lamb! Slaves, bring it quickly, the storm-cloud is about to burst.

ÆSCHYLUS. Shame on your Cretan monologues! Shame on the infamous nuptials that you introduce into the tragic art!

DIONYSUS. Curb yourself, noble Æschylus, and as for you, my poor Euripides, be prudent, protect yourself from this hail-storm, or he may easily in his rage hit you full in the temple with some terrible word, that would let out your Telephus. Come, Æschylus, no flying into a temper! discuss the question coolly; poets must not revile each other like market wenches. Why, you shout at the very outset and burst out like a pine that catches fire in the forest.

EURIPIDES. I am ready for the contest and don't flinch; let him choose the attack or the defence; let him discuss everything, the dialogue, the choruses, the tragic genius, Peleus, Æolus, Meleager and especially Telephus.

DIONYSUS. And what do you propose to do, Æschylus? Speak!

ÆSCHYLUS. I should have wished not to maintain a contest that is not equal or fair.

DIONYSUS. Why not fair?

ÆSCHYLUS. Because my poetry has outlived me, whilst his died with him and he can use it against me. However, I submit to your ruling.

DIONYSUS. Let incense and a brazier be brought, for I want to offer a prayer to the gods. Thanks to their favour, may I be able to decide between these ingenious rivals as a clever expert should! And do you sing a hymn in honour of the Muses.

CHORUS. Oh! ye chaste Muses, the daughters of Zeus, you who read the fine and subtle minds of thought-makers when they enter upon a contest of quibbles and tricks, look down on these two powerful athletes; inspire them, one with mighty words and the other with odds and ends of verses. Now the great mind contest is beginning.

DIONYSUS. And do you likewise make supplication to the gods before entering the lists.

ÆSCHYLUS. Oh, Demeter! who hast formed my mind, may I be able to prove myself worthy of thy Mysteries!

DIONYSUS. And you, Euripides, prove yourself meet to sprinkle incense on the brazier.

EURIPIDES. Thanks, but I sacrifice to other gods.

DIONYSUS. To private gods of your own, which you have made after your own image?

EURIPIDES. Why, certainly!

DIONYSUS. Well then, invoke your gods.

EURIPIDES. Oh! thou Æther, on which I feed, oh! thou Volubility of Speech, oh! Craftiness, oh! Subtle Scent! enable me to crush the arguments of my opponent.

CHORUS. We are curious to see upon what ground these clever tilers are

going to measure each other. Their tongue is keen, their wit is ready, their heart is full of audacity. From the one we must expect both elegance and polish of language, whereas the other, armed with his ponderous words, will fall hip and thigh upon his foe and with a single blow tear and scatter all his vain devices.

DIONYSUS. Come, be quick and speak and let your words be elegant, but without false imagery or platitude.

EURIPIDES. I shall speak later of my poetry, but I want first to prove that Æschylus is merely a wretched impostor; I shall relate by what means he tricked a coarse audience, trained in the school of Phrynichus. First one saw some seated figure, who was veiled, some Achilles or Niobé, who then strutted about the stage, but neither uncovered their face nor uttered a syllable.

DIONYSUS. I<sup>3</sup> faith! that's true!

EURIPIDES. Meanwhile, the Chorus would pour forth as many as four tirades one after the other, without stopping, and the characters would still maintain their stony silence.

DIONYSUS. I liked their silence, and these mutes pleased me no less than those characters that have such a heap to say nowadays.

EURIPIDES. 'Tis because you were a fool, understand that well.

DIONYSUS. Possibly; but what was his object?

EURIPIDES. 'Twas pure quackery; in this way the spectator would sit motionless, waiting, waiting for Niobé to say something, and the piece would go running on.

DIONYSUS. Oh! the rogue! how he deceived me! Well, Æschylus, why are you so restless? Why this impatience, eh?

EURIPIDES. 'Tis because he sees himself beaten. Then when he had rambled on well, and got half-way through the piece, he would spout some dozen big, blustering, winged words, tall as mountains, terrible scarers, which the spectator admired without understanding what they meant.

ÆSCHYLUS. Oh! great gods!

DIONYSUS. Silence!

EURIPIDES. There was no comprehending one word.

DIONYSUS (*to* ÆSCHYLUS). Don't grind your teeth.

EURIPIDES. There were Scamanders, abysses, griffins with eagles' beaks chiselled upon brazen bucklers, all words with frowning crests and hard, hard to understand.

DIONYSUS. 'Faith, I was kept awake almost an entire night, trying to think out his yellow bird, half cock and half horse.

ÆSCHYLUS. Why, fool, 'tis a device that is painted on the prow of a vessel.

DIONYSUS. Ah! I actually thought 'twas Eryxis, the son of Philoxenus.

EURIPIDES. But what did you want with a cock in tragedy?

ÆSCHYLUS. But you, you foe of the gods, what have you done that is so good?

EURIPIDES. Oh! I have not made horses with cocks' heads like you, nor goats with deer's horns, as you may see 'em on Persian tapestries; but, when I

received tragedy from your hands, it was quite bloated with enormous, ponderous words, and I began by lightening it of its heavy baggage and treated it with little verses, with subtle arguments, with the sap of white beet and decoctions of philosophical folly, the whole being well filtered together; then I fed it with monologues, mixing in some Cephisophon; but I did not chatter at random nor mix in any ingredients that first came to hand; from the outset I made my subject clear, and told the origin of the piece.

ÆSCHYLUS. Well, that was better than telling your own.

EURIPIDES. Then, starting with the very first verse, each character played his part; all spoke, both woman and slave and master, young girl and old hag.

ÆSCHYLUS. And was not such daring deserving of death?

EURIPIDES. No, by Apollo! 'twas to please the people.

DIONYSUS. Oh! leave that alone, do; 'tis not the best side of your case.

EURIPIDES. Furthermore, I taught the spectators the art of speech . . .

ÆSCHYLUS. 'Tis true indeed! Would that you had burst before you did it!

EURIPIDES. . . . the use of the straight lines and of the corners of language, the science of thinking, of reading, of understanding, plotting, loving, deceit, of suspecting evil, of thinking of everything. . . .

ÆSCHYLUS. Oh! true, true again!

EURIPIDES. I introduced our private life upon the stage, our common habits; and 'twas bold of me, for everyone was at home with these and could be my critic; I did not burst out into big noisy words to prevent their comprehension; nor did I terrify the audience by showing them Cycni and Memnons on chariots harnessed with steeds and jingling bells. Look at his disciples and look at mine. His are Phormisus and Megænetus of Magnesia, all a-bristle with long beards, spears and trumpets, and grinning with sardonic and ferocious laughter, while my disciples are Clitophon and the graceful Theramenes.

DIONYSUS. Theramenes? An able man and ready for anything; a man, who in imminent dangers knew well how to get out of the scrape by saying he was from Chios and not from Ceos.

EURIPIDES. 'Tis thus that I taught my audience how to judge, namely, by introducing the art of reasoning and considering into tragedy. Thanks to me, they understand everything, discern all things, conduct their households better and ask themselves, "What is to be thought of this? Where is that? Who has taken the other thing?"

DIONYSUS. Yes, certainly, and now every Athenian who returns home, bawls to his slaves, "Where is the stew-pot? Who has eaten off the sprat's head? Where is the clove of garlic that was left over from yesterday? Who has been nibbling at my olives?" Whereas formerly they kept their seats with mouths agape like fools and idiots.

CHORUS. You hear him, illustrious Achilles, and what are you going to reply? Only take care that your rage does not lead you astray, for he has handled you brutally. My noble friend, don't get carried away; furl all your sails, except the top-gallants, so that your ship may only advance slowly, until you feel yourself driven forward by a soft and favourable wind. Come then,

you who were the first of the Greeks to construct imposing monuments of words and to raise the old tragedy above childish trifling; open a free course to the torrent of your words.

ÆSCHYLUS. This contest rouses my gall; my heart is boiling over with wrath. Am I bound to dispute with this fellow? But I will not let him think me unarmed and helpless. So, answer me! what is it in a poet one admires?

EURIPIDES. Wise counsels, which make the citizens better.

ÆSCHYLUS. And if you have failed in this duty, if out of honest and pure-minded men you have made rogues, what punishment do you think is your meet?

DIONYSUS. Death. I will reply for him.

ÆSCHYLUS. Behold then what great and brave men I bequeathed to him! They did not shirk the public burdens; they were not idlers, rogues and cheats, as they are to-day; their very breath was spears, pikes, helmets with white crests, breastplates and greaves; they were gallant souls encased in seven folds of ox-leather.

EURIPIDES. I must beware! he will crush me beneath the sheer weight of his hail of armour.

DIONYSUS. And how did you teach them this bravery? Speak, Æschylus, and don't display so much haughty swagger.

ÆSCHYLUS. By composing a drama full of the spirit of Ares.

DIONYSUS. Which one?

ÆSCHYLUS. The Seven Chiefs before Thebes. Every man who had once seen it longed to be marching to battle.

DIONYSUS. And you did very wrongly; through you the Thebans have become more warlike; for this misdeed you deserve to be well beaten.

ÆSCHYLUS. You too might have trained yourself, but you were not willing. Then, by producing "The Persæ," I have taught you to conquer all your enemies; 'twas my greatest work.

DIONYSUS. Aye, I shook with joy at the announcement of the death of Darius; and the Chorus immediately clapped their hands and shouted, "Triumph!"

ÆSCHYLUS. Those are the subjects that poets should use. Note how useful, even from remotest times, the poets of noble thought have been! Orpheus taught us the mystic rites and the horrid nature of murder; Musæus, the healing of ailments and the oracles; Hesiod, the tilling of the soil and the times for delving and harvest. And does not divine Homer owe his immortal glory to his noble teachings? Is it not he who taught the warlike virtues, the art of fighting and of carrying arms?

DIONYSUS. At all events he has not taught it to Pantacles, the most awkward of all men; t'other day, when he was directing a procession, 'twas only after he had put on his helmet that he thought of fixing in the crest.

ÆSCHYLUS. But he has taught a crowd of brave warriors, such as Lamachus, the hero of Athens. 'Tis from Homer that I borrowed the Patrocli and the lion-hearted Teucers, whom I revived to the citizens, to incite them to show



themselves worthy of these illustrious examples when the trumpets sounded. But I showed them neither Sthenobœa nor shameless Phædra; and I don't remember ever having placed an amorous woman on the stage.

EURIPIDES. No, no, you have never known Aphrodité.

ÆSCHYLUS. And I am proud of it. Whereas with you and those like you, she appears everywhere and in every shape; so that even you yourself were ruined and undone by her.

DIONYSUS. That's true; the crimes you imputed to the wives of others, you suffered from in turn.

EURIPIDES. But, cursed man, what harm have my Sthenobœas done to Athens?

ÆSCHYLUS. You are the cause of honest wives of honest citizens drinking hemlock, so greatly have your Bellerophons made them blush.

EURIPIDES. Why, did I invent the story of Phædra?

ÆSCHYLUS. No, the story is true enough; but the poet should hide what is vile and not produce nor represent it on the stage. The schoolmaster teaches little children and the poet men of riper age. We must only display what is good.

EURIPIDES. And when you talk to us of towering mountains—Lycabettus and of the frowning Parnes—is that teaching us what is good? Why not use human language?

ÆSCHYLUS. Why, miserable man, the expression must always rise to the height of great maxims and of noble thoughts. Thus as the garment of the demi-gods is more magnificent, so also is their language more sublime. I ennobled the stage, while you have degraded it.

EURIPIDES. And how so, pray?

ÆSCHYLUS. Firstly you have dressed the kings in rags, so that they might inspire pity.

EURIPIDES. Where's the harm?

ÆSCHYLUS. You are the cause why no rich man will now equip the galleys, they dress themselves in tatters, groan and say they are poor.

DIONYSUS. Aye, by Demeter! and he wears a tunic of fine wool underneath; and when he has deceived us with his lies, he may be seen turning up on the fish-market.

ÆSCHYLUS. Moreover, you have taught boasting and quibbling; the wrestling schools are deserted and the young fellows have submitted themselves to outrage, in order that they might learn to reel off idle chatter, and the sailors have dared to bandy words with their officers. In my day they only knew how to ask for their ship's-biscuit and to shout "Yo ho! heave ho!"

DIONYSUS. . . . and to let wind under the nose of the rower below them, to befoul their mate with filth and to steal when they went ashore. Nowadays they argue instead of rowing and the ship can travel as slow as she likes.

ÆSCHYLUS. Of what crimes is he not the author? Has he not shown us procurers, women who get delivered in the temples, have traffic with their brothers, and say that life is not life. 'Tis thanks to him that our city is full of



scribes and buffoons, veritable apes, whose grimaces are incessantly deceiving the people; but there is no one left who knows how to carry a torch, so little is it practised.

DIONYSUS. I' faith, that's true! I almost died of laughter at the last Panathenæa at seeing a slow, fat, pale-faced fellow, who ran well behind all the rest, bent completely double and evidently in horrible pain. At the gate of the Ceramicus the spectators started beating his belly, sides, flanks and thighs; these slaps knocked so much wind out of him that it extinguished his torch and he hurried away.

CHORUS. 'Tis a serious issue and an important debate; the fight is proceeding hotly and its decision will be difficult; for, as violently as the one attacks, as cleverly and as subtly does the other reply. But don't keep always to the same ground; you are not at the end of your specious artifices. Make use of every trick you have, no matter whether it be old or new! Out with everything boldly, blunt though it be; risk anything—that is smart and to the point. Perchance you fear that the audience is too stupid to grasp your subtleties, but be reassured, for that is no longer the case. They are all well-trained folk; each has his book, from which he learns the art of quibbling; such wits as they are happily endowed with have been rendered still keener through study. So have no fear! Attack everything, for you face an enlightened audience.

EURIPIDES. Let's take your prologues; 'tis the beginnings of this able poet's tragedies that I wish to examine at the outset. He was obscure in the description of his subjects.

DIONYSUS. And which prologue are you going to examine?

EURIPIDES. A lot of them. Give me first of all that of the "Orestes."

DIONYSUS. All keep silent. Æschylus, recite.

ÆSCHYLUS. "Oh! Hermes of the nether world, whose watchful power executes the paternal bidding, be my deliverer, assist me, I pray thee. I come, I return to this land."

DIONYSUS. Is there a single word to condemn in that?

EURIPIDES. More than a dozen.

DIONYSUS. But there are but three verses in all.

EURIPIDES. And there are twenty faults in each.

DIONYSUS. Æschylus, I beg you to keep silent; otherwise, besides these three iambs, there will be many more attacked.

ÆSCHYLUS. What? Keep silent before this fellow?

DIONYSUS. If you will take my advice.

EURIPIDES. He begins with a fearful blunder. Do you see the stupid thing?

DIONYSUS. Faith! I don't care if I don't.

ÆSCHYLUS. A blunder? In what way?

EURIPIDES. Repeat the first verse.

ÆSCHYLUS. "Oh! Hermes of the nether world, whose watchful power executes the paternal bidding."

EURIPIDES. Is not Orestes speaking in this fashion before his father's tomb?

ÆSCHYLUS. Agreed.

EURIPIDES. Does he mean to say that Hermes had watched, only that Agamemnon should perish at the hands of a woman and be the victim of a criminal intrigue?

ÆSCHYLUS. 'Tis not to the god of trickery, but to Hermes the benevolent, that he gives the name of god of the nether world, and this he proves by adding that Hermes is accomplishing the mission given him by his father.

EURIPIDES. The blunder is even worse than I had thought to make it out; for if he holds his office in the nether world from his father . . .

DIONYSUS. It means his father has made him a grave-digger.

ÆSCHYLUS. Dionysus, your wine is not redolent of perfume.

DIONYSUS. Continue, Æschylus, and you, Euripides, spy out the faults as he proceeds.

ÆSCHYLUS. "Be my deliverer, assist me, I pray thee. I come, I return to this land."

EURIPIDES. Our clever Æschylus says the very same thing twice over.

ÆSCHYLUS. How twice over?

EURIPIDES. Examine your expressions, for I am going to show you the repetition. "I come, I return to this land." But *I come* is the same thing as *I return*.

DIONYSUS. Undoubtedly. 'Tis as though I said to my neighbour, "Lend me either your kneading-trough or your trough to knead in."

ÆSCHYLUS. No, you babbler, no, 'tis not the same thing, and the verse is excellent.

DIONYSUS. Indeed! then prove it.

ÆSCHYLUS. To come is the act of a citizen who has suffered no misfortune; but the exile both comes and returns.

DIONYSUS. Excellent! by Apollo! What do you say to that, Euripides?

EURIPIDES. I say that Orestes did not return to his country, for he came there secretly, without the consent of those in power.

DIONYSUS. Very good indeed! by Hermes! only I have not a notion what it is you mean.

EURIPIDES. Go on.

DIONYSUS. Come, be quick, Æschylus, continue; and you look out for the faults.

ÆSCHYLUS. "At the foot of this tomb I invoke my father and beseech him to hearken to me and to hear."

EURIPIDES. Again a repetition, to hearken and to hear are obviously the same thing.

DIONYSUS. Why, wretched man, he's addressing the dead, whom to call thrice even is not sufficient.

ÆSCHYLUS. And you, how do you form your prologues?

EURIPIDES. I am going to tell you, and if you find a repetition, an idle word or inappropriate, let me be scouted!

DIONYSUS. Come, speak; 'tis my turn to listen. Let us hear the beauty of your prologues.

EURIPIDES. "Œdipus was a fortunate man at first . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. Not at all; he was destined to misfortune before he even existed, since Apollo predicted he would kill his father before ever he was born. How can one say he was fortunate at first?

EURIPIDES. ". . . and he became the most unfortunate of mortals afterwards."

ÆSCHYLUS. No, he did not become so, for he never ceased being so. Look at the facts! First of all, when scarcely born, he is exposed in the middle of winter in an earthenware vessel, for fear he might become the murderer of his father, if brought up; then he came to Polybus with his feet swollen; furthermore, while young, he marries an old woman, who is also his mother, and finally he blinds himself.

DIONYSUS. 'Faith! I think he could not have done worse to have been a colleague of Erasinidas.

EURIPIDES. You can chatter as you will, my prologues are very fine.

ÆSCHYLUS. I will take care not to carp at them verse by verse and word for word; but, an it please the gods, a simple little bottle will suffice me for withering every one of your prologues.

EURIPIDES. You will wither my prologues with a little bottle?

ÆSCHYLUS. With only one. You make verses of such a kind, that one can adapt what one will to your iambics: a little bit of fluff, a little bottle, a little bag. I am going to prove it.

EURIPIDES. You will prove it?

ÆSCHYLUS. Yes.

DIONYSUS. Come, recite.

EURIPIDES. "Ægyptus, according to the most widely spread reports, having landed at Argos with his fifty daughters . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

EURIPIDES. What little bottle? May the plague seize you!

DIONYSUS. Recite another prologue to him. We shall see.

EURIPIDES. "Dionysus, who leads the choral dance on Parnassus with the thyrsus in his hand and clothed in skins of fawns . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

DIONYSUS. There again his little bottle upsets us.

EURIPIDES. He won't bother us much longer. I have a certain prologue to which he cannot adapt his tag: "There is no perfect happiness; this one is of noble origin, but poor; another of humble birth . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

DIONYSUS. Euripides!

EURIPIDES. What's the matter?

DIONYSUS. Clue up your sails, for this damned little bottle is going to blow a gale.

EURIPIDES. Little I care, by Demeter! I am going to make it burst in his hands.

DIONYSUS. Then out with it; recite another prologue, but beware, beware of the little bottle.

EURIPIDES. "Cadmus, the son of Agenor, while leaving the city of Sidon . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

DIONYSUS. Oh! my poor friend; buy that bottle, do, for it is going to tear all your prologues to ribbons.

EURIPIDES. What? Am I to buy it of him?

DIONYSUS. If you take my advice.

EURIPIDES. No, not I, for I have many prologues to which he cannot possibly fit his catchword: "Pelops, the son of Tantalus, having started for Pisa on his swift chariot . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

DIONYSUS. D'ye see? Again he has popped in his little bottle. Come, Æschylus, he is going to buy it of you at any price, and you can have a splendid one for an obolus.

EURIPIDES. By Zeus, no, not yet! I have plenty of other prologues. "Ceneus in the fields one day . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

EURIPIDES. Let me first finish the opening verse: "Ceneus in the fields one day, having made an abundant harvest and sacrificed the first-fruits to the gods . . ."

ÆSCHYLUS. . . . lost his little bottle.

DIONYSUS. During the sacrifice? And who was the thief?

EURIPIDES. Allow him to try with this one: "Zeus, as even Truth has said . . ."

DIONYSUS (*to EURIPIDES*). You have lost again; he is going to say, "lost his little bottle," for that bottle sticks to your prologues like a ringworm. But, in the name of the gods, turn now to his choruses.

EURIPIDES. I will prove that he knows nothing of lyric poetry, and that he repeats himself incessantly.

CHORUS. What's he going to say now? I am itching to know what criticisms he is going to make on the poet, whose sublime songs so far outclass those of his contemporaries. I cannot imagine with what he is going to reproach the king of the Dionysia, and I tremble for the aggressor.

EURIPIDES. Oh! those wonderful songs! But watch carefully, for I am going to condense them all into a single one.

DIONYSUS. And I am going to take pebbles to count the fragments.

EURIPIDES. "Oh, Achilles, King of Phthiotis, hearken to the shout of the conquering foe and haste to sustain the assault. We dwellers in the marshes do honour to Hermes, the author of our race. Haste to sustain the assault."

DIONYSUS. There, Æschylus, you have already two assaults against you.

EURIPIDES. "Oh, son of Atreus, the most illustrious of the Greeks, thou, who rulest so many nations, hearken to me. Haste to the assault."

DIONYSUS. A third assault. Beware, Æschylus.

EURIPIDES. "Keep silent, for the inspired priestesses are opening the temple



of Artemis. Haste to sustain the assault. I have the right to proclaim that our warriors are leaving under propitious auspices. Haste to sustain the assault."

DIONYSUS. Great gods, what a number of assaults! my kidneys are quite swollen with fatigue; I shall have to go to the bath after all these assaults.

EURIPIDES. Not before you have heard this other song arranged for the music of the cithara.

DIONYSUS. Come then, continue; but, prithee, no more "assaults."

EURIPIDES. "What! the two powerful monarchs, who reign over the Grecian youth, phlattothrattophlattothrat, are sending the Sphinx, that terrible har-binger of death, phlattothrattophlattothrat. With his avenging arm bearing a spear, phlattothrattophlattothrat, the impetuous bird delivers those who lean to the side of Ajax, phlattothrattophlattothrat, to the dogs who roam in the clouds, phlattothrattophlattothrat."

DIONYSUS (*to ÆSCHYLUS*). What is this "phlattothrat"? Does it come from Marathon or have you picked it out of some labourer's chanty?

ÆSCHYLUS. I took what was good and improved it still more, so that I might not be accused of gathering the same flowers as Phrynichus in the meadow of the Muse. But this man borrows from everybody, from the suggestions of prostitutes, from the sons of Melitus, from the Carian flute-music, from wailing women, from dancing-girls. I am going to prove it, so let a lyre be brought. But what need of a lyre in his case? Where is the girl with the castanets? Come, thou Muse of Euripides; 'tis quite thy business to accompany songs of this sort.

DIONYSUS. This Muse has surely done fellation in her day, like a Lesbian wanton.

ÆSCHYLUS. "Ye halcyons, who twitter over the ever-flowing billows of the sea, the damp dew of the waves glistens on your wings; and you spiders, who we-we-we-we-we-weave the long woofs of your webs in the corners of our houses with your nimble feet like the noisy shuttle, there where the dolphin by bounding in the billows, under the influence of the flute, predicts a favourable voyage; thou glorious ornaments of the vine, the slender tendrils that support the grape. Child, throw thine arms about my neck." Do you note the harmonious rhythm?

DIONYSUS. Yes.

ÆSCHYLUS. Do you note it?

DIONYSUS. Yes, undoubtedly.

ÆSCHYLUS. And does the author of such rubbish dare to criticize my songs? he, who imitates the twelve postures of Cyrené in his poetry? There you have his lyric melodies, but I still want to give you a sample of his monologues. "Oh! dark shadows of the night! what horrible dream are you sending me from the depths of your sombre abysses! Oh! dream, thou bondsman of Pluto, thou inanimate soul, child of the dark night, thou dread phantom in long black garments, how bloodthirsty, bloodthirsty is thy glance! how sharp are thy claws! Handmaidens, kindle the lamp, draw up the dew of the rivers in your vases and make the water hot; I wish to purify myself of this dream sent me



by the gods. Oh! king of the ocean, that's right, that's right! Oh! my comrades, behold this wonder. Glycé has robbed me of my cock and has fled. Oh, Nymphs of the mountains! oh! Mania! seize her! How unhappy I am! I was full busy with my work, I was sp-sp-sp-sp-spinning the flax that was on my spindle, I was rounding off the clew that I was to go and sell in the market at dawn; and he flew off, flew off, cleaving the air with his swift wings; he left to me nothing but pain, pain! What tears, tears, poured, poured from my unfortunate eyes! Oh! Cretans, children of Ida, take your bows; help me, haste hither, surround the house. And thou, divine huntress, beautiful Artemis, come with thy hounds and search through the house. And thou also, daughter of Zeus, seize the torches in thy ready hands and go before me to Glycé's home, for I propose to go there and rummage everywhere."

DIONYSUS. That's enough of choruses.

ÆSCHYLUS. Yes, faith, enough indeed! I wish now to see my verses weighed in the scales; 'tis the only way to end this poetic struggle.

DIONYSUS. Well then, come, I am going to sell the poet's genius the same way cheese is sold in the market.

CHORUS. Truly clever men are possessed of an inventive mind. Here again is a new idea that is marvellous and strange, and which another would not have thought of; as for myself I would not have believed anyone who had told me of it, I would have treated him as a driveller.

DIONYSUS. Come, hither to the scales.

ÆSCHYLUS and EURIPIDES. Here we are.

DIONYSUS. Let each one hold one of the scales, recite a verse, and not let go until I have cried, "Cuckoo!"

ÆSCHYLUS and EURIPIDES. We understand.

DIONYSUS. Well then, recite and keep your hands on the scales.

EURIPIDES. "Would it had pleased the gods that the vessel Argo had never unfurled the wings of her sails!"

ÆSCHYLUS. "Oh! river Sperchius! oh! meadows, where the oxen graze!"

DIONYSUS. Cuckoo! let go! Oh! the verse of Æschylus sinks far the lower of the two.

EURIPIDES. And why?

DIONYSUS. Because, like the wool-merchants, who moisten their wares, he has thrown a river into his verse and has made it quite wet, whereas yours was winged and flew away.

EURIPIDES. Come, another verse! You recite, Æschylus, and you, weigh.

DIONYSUS. Hold the scales again.

ÆSCHYLUS and EURIPIDES. Ready.

DIONYSUS (to EURIPIDES). You begin.

EURIPIDES. "Eloquence is Persuasion's only sanctuary."

ÆSCHYLUS. "Death is the only god whom gifts cannot bribe."

DIONYSUS. Let go! let go! Here again our friend Æschylus' verse drags down the scale; 'tis because he has thrown in Death, the weightiest of all ills.

EURIPIDES. And I Persuasion; my verse is excellent.

DIONYSUS. Persuasion has both little weight and little sense. But hunt again for a big weighty verse and solid withal, that it may assure you the victory.

EURIPIDES. But where am I to find one—where?

DIONYSUS. I'll tell you one: "Achilles has thrown two and four." Come, recite! 'tis the last trial.

EURIPIDES. "With his arm he seized a mace, studded with iron."

ÆSCHYLUS. "Chariot upon chariot and corpse upon corpse."

DIONYSUS (*to EURIPIDES*). There you're foiled again.

EURIPIDES. Why?

DIONYSUS. There are two chariots and two corpses in the verse; why, 'tis a weight a hundred Egyptians could not lift.

ÆSCHYLUS. 'Tis no longer verse against verse that I wish to weigh, but let him clamber into the scale himself, he, his children, his wife, Cephisophon and all his works; against all these I will place but two of my verses on the other side.

DIONYSUS. I will *not* be their umpire, for they are dear to me and I will not have a foe in either of them; meseems the one is mighty clever, while the other simply delights me.

PLUTO. Then you are foiled in the object of your voyage.

DIONYSUS. And if I do decide?

PLUTO. You shall take with you whichever of the twain you declare the victor; thus you will not have come in vain.

DIONYSUS. That's all right! Well then, listen; I have come down to find a poet.

EURIPIDES. And with what intent?

DIONYSUS. So that the city, when once it has escaped the imminent dangers of the war, may have tragedies produced. I have resolved to take back whichever of the two is prepared to give good advice to the citizens. So first of all, what think you of Alcibiades? For the city is in most difficult labour over this question.

EURIPIDES. And what does it think about it?

DIONYSUS. What does it think? It regrets him, hates him, and yet wishes to have him, all at the same time. But tell me your opinion, both of you.

EURIPIDES. I hate the citizen who is slow to serve his country, quick to involve it in the greatest troubles, ever alert to his own interests, and a bungler where those of the State are at stake.

DIONYSUS. That's good, by Posidon! And you, what is your opinion?

ÆSCHYLUS. A lion's whelp should not be reared within the city. No doubt that's best; but if the lion has been reared, one must submit to his ways.

DIONYSUS. Zeus, the Deliverer! this puzzles me greatly. The one is clever, the other clear and precise. Now each of you tell me your idea of the best way to save the State.

EURIPIDES. If Cinesias were fitted to Cleocritus as a pair of wings, and the wind were to carry the two of them across the waves of the sea . . .

DIONYSUS. 'Twould be funny. But what is he driving at?

EURIPIDES. . . . they could throw vinegar into the eyes of the foe in the event of a sea-fight. But I know something else I want to tell you.

DIONYSUS. Go on.

EURIPIDES. When we put trust in what we mistrust and mistrust what we trust . . .

DIONYSUS. What? I don't understand. Tell us something less profound, but clearer.

EURIPIDES. If we were to mistrust the citizens, whom we trust, and to employ those whom we to-day neglect, we should be saved. Nothing succeeds with us; very well then, let's do the opposite thing, and our deliverance will be assured.

DIONYSUS. Very well spoken. You are the most ingenious of men, a true Palamedes! Is this fine idea your own or is it Cephisophon's?

EURIPIDES. My very own,—bar the vinegar, which is Cephisophon's.

DIONYSUS (*to ÆSCHYLUS*). And you, what have you to say?

ÆSCHYLUS. Tell me first who the commonwealth employs. Are they the just?

DIONYSUS. Oh! she holds *them* in abhorrence.

ÆSCHYLUS. What, are then the wicked those she loves?

DIONYSUS. Not at all, but she employs them against her will.

ÆSCHYLUS. Then what deliverance can there be for a city that will neither have cape nor cloak?

DIONYSUS. Discover, I adjure you, discover a way to save her from a shipwreck.

ÆSCHYLUS. I will tell you the way on earth, but I won't here.

DIONYSUS. No, send her this blessing from here.

ÆSCHYLUS. They will be saved when they have learnt that the land of the foe is theirs and their own land belongs to the foe; that their vessels are their true wealth, the only one upon which they can rely.

DIONYSUS. That's true, but the dicasts devour everything.

PLUTO (*to DIONYSUS*). Now decide.

DIONYSUS. 'Tis for you to decide, but I choose him whom my heart prefers.

EURIPIDES. You called the gods to witness that you would bear me through; remember your oath and choose your friends.

DIONYSUS. Yes, "my tongue has sworn." . . . But I choose Æschylus.

EURIPIDES. What have you done, you wretch?

DIONYSUS. I? I have decided that Æschylus is the victor. What then?

EURIPIDES. And you dare to look me in the face after such a shameful deed?

DIONYSUS. "Why shameful, if the spectators do not think so?"

EURIPIDES. Cruel wretch, will you leave me pitilessly among the dead?

DIONYSUS. "Who knows if living be not dying, if breathing be not feasting, if sleep be not a fleece?"

PLUTO. Enter my halls. Come, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS. What shall we do there?

PLUTO. I want to entertain my guests before they leave.

DIONYSUS. Well said, by Zeus; 'tis the very thing to please me best.

CHORUS. Blessed the man who has perfected wisdom! Everything is happiness for him. Behold Æschylus; thanks to the talent, to the cleverness he has shown, he returns to his country; and his fellow-citizens, his relations, his friends will all hail his return with joy. Let us beware of jabbering with Socrates and of disdaining the sublime notes of the tragic Muse. To pass an idle life reeling off grandiloquent speeches and foolish quibbles, is the part of a madman.

PLUTO. Farewell, Æschylus! Go back to earth and may your noble precepts both save our city and cure the mad; there are such, a many of them! Carry this rope from me to Cleophon, this one to Myrmex and Nicomachus, the public receivers, and this other one to Archenomus. Bid them come here at once and without delay; if not, by Apollo, I will brand them with the hot iron. I will make one bundle of them and Adimantus, the son of Leucolophus, and despatch the lot into hell with all possible speed.

ÆSCHYLUS. I will do your bidding, and do you make Sophocles occupy my seat. Let him take and keep it for me, against I should ever return here. In fact I award him the second place among the tragic poets. As for this impostor, watch that he never usurps my throne, even should he be placed there in spite of himself.

PLUTO (*to the CHORUS OF THE INITIATE*). Escort him with your sacred torches, singing to him as you go his own hymns and choruses.

CHORUS. Ye deities of the nether world, grant a pleasant journey to the poet who is leaving us to return to the light of day; grant likewise wise and healthy thoughts to our city. Put an end to the fearful calamities that overwhelm us, to the awful clatter of arms. As for Cleophon and the likes of him, let them go, an it please them, and fight in their own land.



















